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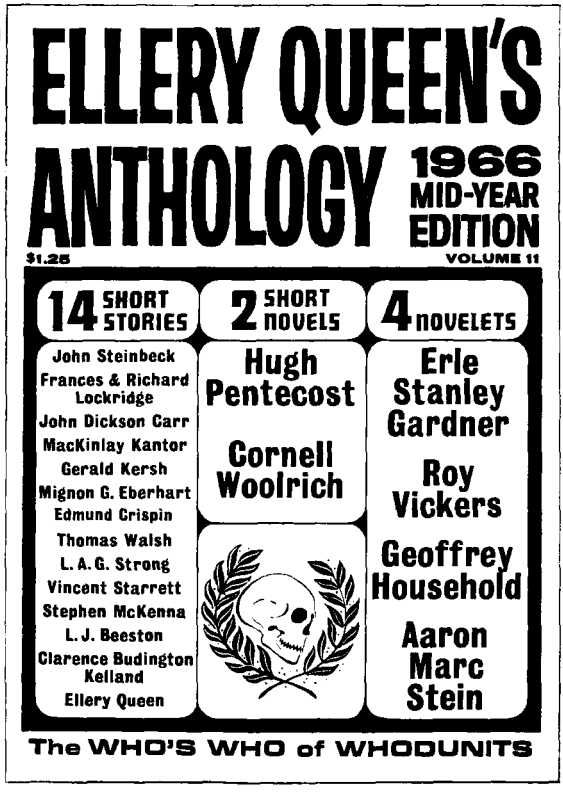

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Mrs. Sarah Brady remembered all the things she saw and did that fateful Monday . . . her last glimpse of her only sister, Alice (poor Alice) . . . all the things the others had said and done—Henny, Alice's cook-housekeeper, and Bobby and Suzanne, Alice's grandchildren, and Karen, Alice's daughter-in-law . . . her own trip downtown with Karen and her return alone, ahead of Karen . . . all the things that had splintered an ordinary Monday out of shape . . .

One of Charlotte Armstrong's most delicately and scrupulously crafted stories about the quality of truth . . .

THE SPLINTERED MONDAY

by CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

MRS. SARAH BRADY AWAKENED in the guest room of her nephew Jeff's house, and for a moment or two was simply glad for the clean page of a new day. Then she found her bookmark between the past and the future. Oh, yes. Her sister, Alice, had died on Monday, been buried on Wednesday. (Poor Alice.) This was Saturday. Mrs. Brady's daughter, Del, was coming, late today, to drive her mother back home tomorrow.

Now that she knew where she was, Mrs. Brady cast a brief prayer into time and space, then put her lean old feet to the floor.

The house was very still. For days now it had seemed muffled, everyone moving slowly in a quiet gloom, sweetened by mutually considerate behavior. Mrs. Brady had a feeling that her own departure would signal a lift of some kind in the atmosphere. And she did not particularly like the idea.

She trotted into the guest bathroom to wash herself, examining expertly the state of her health. Mrs. Brady had an uncertain heart, but she had lived with it a long time, and she knew how to manage. Still, she tried to get along with as few drugs as she successfully could, so she opened the medicine cabinet, peered at her bottle of pills, but did not touch it.

No, on the whole, she thought, it would be better to get through the morning without a pill—at least,

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to see how it would go. She dressed herself briskly and set forth into the hall.

It was going to be a lovely summer day, weather-wise.

The door of the enormous front bedroom stood wide and her sister's bed, neatly made, shouted that poor Alice was gone. Mrs. Brady sampled the little recurring shock. It was not exactly lessening, but it was changing character. Yes, it was going over from feeling to thinking. She could perceive with her mind the hole in the fabric, the loss of a presence, the absence of a force.

But Mrs. Brady found herself frowning slightly as she proceeded downstairs and back through the house to the breakfast room. This was her last day here. And her last chance? Had she *cause* to feel offended? Or to feel whatever this uneasiness of hers could be called?

Henny, the cook-housekeeper and general factotum, came at once with her orange juice. She was a big, rawboned, middle-aged woman with a golden cross dangling at her throat. Henny still had that sad and wary look in her big eyes. She had been much subdued, too much subdued, since Alice's death.

She had taken to being very solicitous, treating Mrs. Brady as if *she* were an invalid. Yet Mrs. Brady and Henny had been good friends for many years. They had set up between them a kind of boisterous relationship, with a running gag that Mrs. Brady was a great nuisance to have around, and Henny, whenever Mrs. Brady visited, wished only to see the last of her.

Perhaps that gag was no longer in good taste—not today, not yet. But the continued coddling rather annoyed Mrs. Brady, who had never asked for it in the beginning and didn't particularly like it now.

When Henny brought her eggs, Mrs. Brady said, "It's surely hard to get used to Alice not being up there, in that room—she was there for so long. When did she last get out and go anywhere?"

"I don't remember, Miz Sarah." Henny obviously wanted to escape.

"Tell me, you last saw her right after she'd had her lunch on Monday?"

"Yes, Ma'am," said Henny, looking miserable.

"And so did I," said Mrs. Brady. "Karen didn't think we should tell her we were going downtown. I didn't even speak to her."

"No. No. You don't want to feel bad about that. Look, you spent the whole morning with her." Henny seemed to be cooing and she was not a cooing woman. "You couldn't know. Miz Del will be here for dinner, I guess. Right?"

"That's right. Henny?"

"Your eggs are getting cold, Miz Sarah."

"Henny," repeated Mrs. Brady sternly, "is there something I haven't been told?"

Henny was startled. Her eyes

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rolled, and her hand clutched at the cross. "I don't know what you mean. I just don't want to talk about it. I don't think you should talk about it, either."

"Why on earth shouldn't I talk about it?"

"I mean . . . Well, you've got to go on," mumbled Henny, "and what's the good of talking about it? Poor thing. I mean, she's probably better off."

Then Henny put her head down and seemed to butt through the swinging door into the kitchen.

Mrs. Brady began to eat her eggs, reflecting on the contradiction of the golden cross and the horror of death—if that was what Henny was trying to be rid of, by calling death "better off."

Well, Mrs. Brady herself was not so crazy about the idea of dying, but she accepted the fact that one inevitably would. It was presumptuous, in her opinion, to say that poor Alice might be better off. Maybe so. But maybe not.

Maybe Henny felt guilty because, during that seemingly normal afternoon, Henny herself had gone up to the third floor to "lie down," as usual, and had not made even a token resistance to the coming of the angel of death, by being alert to his imminence. Nobody had expected Alice to die—not on Monday.

Shock? Maybe I *am* still shocked, she thought. But it didn't click, as the truth should.

Bobby Conley came shuffling in.

"Good morning," said his great-aunt. "No school today?"

"Nope," said Bobby, getting into his chair in a young way that was far more difficult a physical feat than simply sitting down. "But I better hit the books some." Bobby was twenty, and away at college during the winters. He was taking some summer courses, locally.

"Del is coming to fetch me," said Mrs. Brady.

Bobby grunted that he knew. Henny came in with his juice and a mound of toast. Mrs. Brady poured his coffee.

"How do you feel about your parents flying off to Germany and France?" she asked him.

"That's okay," said Bobby. "I'll be living on campus, anyhow."

"And Suzanne back in boarding school. You'll be able to keep an eye on her."

Bobby gave her one blank look, as if to say, How antique to think that anybody should keep an eye on anybody. "Oh, sure," he said tolerantly.

His sister, Suzanne, bounced in, looking like something out of science fiction, with her hair wound on huge rollers all over her small head. "I don't want anything to eat, Henny. I'm reducing."

Mrs. Brady cocked an eye at the bare waistline, exposed between two pieces of cloth, that seemed to her to be tiny enough to snap in a strong breeze. But she said nothing. She

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was not in firm touch with these young people. They had seemed fond of her, in earlier days, but even Susie, at fifteen, had grown away. They went their own ways. And, of course, they should. Mrs. Brady thought they'd had a better break than their father.

Sarah Brady had always felt a kind of responsibility for her nephew, Jeffrey, because she could see, better than anyone else, how he had been burdened all his life. Poor Alice had believed that to be born a beautiful female was all the Lord had ever required of her, and that to have been widowed in her early thirties was surely a preposterous error of some kind. It couldn't happen to her! Poor Alice, with no personal resources, but plenty of money, had taken to the one hobby that appealed to her: she had gone in for ill health.

Sarah understood as much as there was to understand. Alice had been the golden-haired pet, the pampered darling, whereas she, Sarah, three years younger, had been the "clever" one. And the lucky one, thought Sarah now. It may be better to be born lucky than good-looking. She smiled to herself and sighed.

Alice's one child, Jeffrey, had been at his mother's mercy all his life.

But poor Alice, dead or alive, didn't seem to bother Jeffrey's children.

"You were at the beach, Susie, all day Monday," said Mrs. Brady musingly. "But Bobby, you came home for lunch and you were in your room, studying, right across the hall from your grandmother."

They both looked at her like owls.

"I didn't bother her," said Bobby, chewing.

It was Henny who had found Alice, and had called the doctor, after Henny's customary "lie down."

"And she didn't bother you, eh?" Mrs. Brady said.

Suzanne looked at her with round eyes. "If you just didn't tell her you were going anywhere."

And Mrs. Brady thought, *Touché?* Or was the girl thinking of her father?

But Susie was thinking of herself. "I never told her when I was going to the beach. She'd just have a big fit about sharks." One brown shoulder shrugged. "Or chaperones."

Bobby said, "She didn't even know I was going to summer school to pull up my grades. She'd have had a big fit about that too."

"No, it wasn't easy to tell her anything," admitted Mrs. Brady with a thoughtful air. "It never was. *I* don't operate that way. *I'll* have a big fit if I think the world is kept a secret from me."

They were eyeing her. With skepticism? Amusement? Pity? Or with a touch of wonder? Ah, thought Mrs. Brady, they are not as indifferent to death as they pretend.

"So she didn't cry out? Didn't

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ring her bell? You didn't hear a thing?"

"Nope," said Bobby. "Not a croak out of her." Then he turned his face to her, quickly. "I didn't mean to put it . . . I'm sorry." And for one brief moment Mrs. Brady saw an awed and shaken boy, who had never before been across the hall from where someone had died.

But now Karen came in and said, "Good morning, all." She had come in quietly. Her hand touched the young girl's shoulder. Suzanne sat perfectly still under it. Then Karen touched her stepson's hair lightly. Bobby did not flinch.

Mrs. Brady was thinking, They won't give themselves away.

Henny came to serve the mistress of the house with her normal air of devotion. This was Karen's house now. She was a pretty woman, in her thirties, small, compact, well-groomed, gracious in manner. She had been a nurse, hired to take care of poor Alice during one especially trying bout, almost six years ago. Karen and her patient had taken to each other. And when the patient's widowed son had married the nurse, whatever else it may have been, it had seemed a useful and practical arrangement.

Karen's control and gentle good manners, perhaps enhanced by her nurse's training, had been a saving and a soothing influence, all around. She was the one person, Mrs. Brady reflected, who had always given poor Alice her needed dollop of sympathy, who had never, so far as Mrs. Brady knew, been driven to protest, to say, in one way or another, Oh, for pity's sake, cheer up!

When the young people left, Mrs. Brady took another cup of coffee which she didn't want and wasn't supposed to have. She said to Karen, "You know, I've been feeling something—I don't know exactly what. But I hate to go away tomorrow without getting *at* whatever it is. Why do I feel as if I were getting special treatment—the kind that Alice always got?"

"Why, Aunt Sarah," said Karen, smiling, "Of course, you are getting special treatment. We are all so fond of you. Don't you think we realize you have lost your only sister? Oh, it is too bad that this had to happen during your visit. Poor Alice always so looked forward to seeing you."

She did? thought Mrs. Brady. She found that her feet were shuffling, her toes curling. Normally, she appreciated Karen's soothing ways, but not today, somehow.

"I hope you aren't feeling unhappy because you and I went off on a lark on Monday," said Karen gently. "Don't feel that way. Please? There was just no reason to think we shouldn't have gone. There were people in the house. We mustn't be tempted to feel guilty, must we?"

Mrs. Brady examined this. No,

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she thought, but then, to my best knowledge, I have not been tempted to feel guilty.

"You'll be home, back in your own place," Karen was saying, "with all the things you find to do and I know you'll just go on, because you always have." Karen had butter in her mouth. "Now, tell me, is there something Del likes to eat, especially, that I could order for dinner?"

"Nothing special," said Mrs. Brady, rather shortly. "She eats what she's given." She felt, suddenly, that she would be very glad to see her own child. "So do I," she added, "usually."

"Dear Aunt Sarah," said Karen fondly, "as if you've ever been a bit of trouble. But you know, Jeffrey is the one who has been hit the hardest. Don't you think we must try—just to go on? And let time heal? He's going to accept that European assignment. I encouraged him to. Don't you think that's wise? To get away from this house will be so good for him—new scenes and new experiences to help him forget."

"Oh, yes. *I* think it's wise for him to accept that offer," said Sarah Brady. "I thought so before, and told him so, as you know."

"He thinks so much of your judgment," said Karen, "and so do I. It is only the shock—I think we must just plunge into our plans. Let's see. You'll be busy packing today, I suppose?"

"Yes." Mrs. Brady thought to herself, and *that* will take *all* of twenty minutes. She couldn't figure out why she felt so cross.

Karen excused herself, to make her marketing lists; and Mrs. Brady went upstairs, moving through the big pleasantly furnished house with a strong sense of its eclipse. This house was going to be closed. Jeffrey and Karen would be off, abroad, the children away at schools. What will Henny do? she wondered. But Henny was a household jewel who could write her own ticket, having become as valuable as a rare antique.

Mrs. Brady went back to thinking of Monday. She couldn't help it.

Just after lunch, on Monday, Karen had invited her to ride along downtown, while Alice rested. Mrs. Brady, who loved to prowl the streets when she was feeling spry enough, had accepted gladly.

She had gone to get her things, discovered with pleasure a legitimate errand of her own, and then had passed her sister's bedroom door. Karen, in the doorway with a tray in her hands, had made a "shushing" mouth. Alice was not to be told that they were going out. Mrs. Brady had supposed at the time—and still supposed—that to tell Alice would have meant at least five minutes of listening to Alice bemoan the fact that she couldn't go too, or the fact that she was being abandoned.

So Sarah had merely glanced in, seen her sister's head—still golden, courtesy of dye—and the prow of

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her sister's nice straight nose (which had always made her own nose seem even more knobby than it needed to seem), taken the sense of her sister's lair, perfumed, and cluttered with the thousand things that Alice had for her bodily comfort, and heard her sister say, "I wish to rest now," in her piteous, imperious manner. I must be allowed to do exactly as I wish at all times, said Alice's manner, because I am so ill.

Mrs. Brady remembered Karen's saying that Henny needn't bother, Karen would take the tray down; remembered Henny's dive for the stairs-going-up; remembered seeing Bobby, flat on his stomach on the bed, a book on the floor, and his head hanging over it; remembered how the car had pussyfooted out of the driveway, and Karen's sad mischievous smile, when they were finally running free, on their way through the small city to its center.

Mrs. Brady had happily considered what she could, in all conscience, shop for. (She lived very frugally in a tiny apartment, not far from her daughter Del's house.) Karen had discussed a new bedspread for Suzanne and socks for Bobby, and her dentist appointment.

"You won't mind waiting for me, Aunt Sarah?"

"I think I'd rather poke around by myself and take the bus back," Mrs. Brady had said.

"But it's three blocks to walk, from the bus to the house."

"I don't mind. Besides, I have a little errand to do."

"Can't I do it for you?"

"No. No. It's all right, you see, when the three blocks end in a soft chair."

"Well . . . if you insist."

So Mrs. Brady had enjoyed herself in the department store, inspecting bedspreads, and had advised about socks, and then, deposited on the sidewalk near Karen's dentist's building, she had gone her own way. Not far. Not for long. She had that little errand, which gave her a bit of a purpose, and she had accomplished it, and then window-shopped her way to the bus stop, and a bus had come before she was *too* tired . . .

When she had come back into this house, Dr. Clarke was already there, and Henny was weeping. Bobby was in the living room, numb and dumb and dry-eyed. Jeffrey had been notified. And Alice was dead.

Almost as soon as Mrs. Brady had reached her own bathroom, and taken one of her pills against the shock and strain, she'd heard Karen running up the stairs. But Karen did not need her, and then she had heard Jeffrey's voice below. So she had hurried down to stand by, been delegated to watch for Suzanne and break the news gently—as Monday had splintered out of the shape of an ordinary Monday.

Remembering, Mrs. Brady shook her head. But there was no shaking the nagging notion out of it. She

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couldn't help imagining that there *was* something she hadn't been told.

So she marched into her bathroom and took a pill to fortify herself. She intended to fare forth. She intended to see her nephew alone. She really had not—not since, not yet.

It was almost eleven when Mrs. Brady finally made it, by bus, to Jeffrey's office, identified herself to his receptionist, and could not help but feel gratified when Jeffrey came blasting out of his inner recess.

"Aunt Sarah, what the dickens are you doing here?" He was a tall man, a bit thick in the middle these days; his hair was graying; his long face had acquired a permanent look of slight anxiety. He was a quiet man, who ran well in light harness, grateful for peace whenever he got it.

"I won't have another chance to see you alone, Jeff."

"Will you come in?" The anxiety on his face deepened. "Or better still, let's go down to the drug store and have a coffee break."

"All right." She wouldn't risk another coffee. No matter. So he took her down in the elevator and they sat in a leatherette booth. The place was familiar. Mrs. Brady had lived in this town, herself, ten years ago. The druggist knew her. The young girl who tended the snack counter was friendly. Mrs. Brady felt personally comfortable. She ordered a piece of Danish pastry.

But now to business. Studying her nephew's face, she said, "Jeff, it's true. Poor Alice didn't *like* it. We both knew that she wouldn't. I'm sorry that your last talk with her, on Monday morning, had to be even as unpleasant as it was. But I can only say to you that *I* still think you were right to decide to go to Europe, and right to tell her that you *had* decided to go."

"Why, sure, Aunt Sarah," he said, not looking up. "I know that. And don't *you* worry about it for a minute."

"Alice would have been perfectly safe, with all the arrangements you made, and no more miserable than usual. As far as we could *know*."

"I agree. Please, Aunt Sarah, don't think for a moment that anyone is blaming *you*—for your advice or for anything else in the world."

"Oh, Jeff," His Aunt felt impatient with him. "Of course, you're not blaming me. I don't understand why there has to be any thought of blame. *I* happen to know that the Lord is running this world and hasn't yet appointed me to do it. Or you, either." She was sputtering, as of old.

He was smiling at her. "I'm all right, Aunt Sarah," he said affectionately. "It takes a little time, that's all."

"I'm leaving tomorrow."

"I'm glad—" he began, and quickly stopped.

Oh, yes, he was glad she was going. It only confirmed what Mrs. Brady had been feeling. Well? Perhaps, she must concede that she

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could be a bit of a nuisance, too. After all, Jeff was a grown man. He didn't need his Auntie to stiffen him. Or shouldn't. Time would pass, time would heal. Heal what? The truth was, a burden had been lifted from Jeff and his household. All that eternal pussyfooting would be over. Fresh winds would blow.

But they were not blowing—not yet. Was the household guilty of being just a little *too* glad? And *too* soon?

No. She still sensed that she, Sarah Brady, was being treated too gently, in some way. She couldn't pinpoint one single piece of clear evidence—but she knew in her bones that she was being "handled."

So? Had Sarah Brady come to such a pass? She didn't relish it. Why, Alice was the one who always had to be handled. All her life. In fact, that was how Alice managed the rest of the world. If it did not behave just as she wished, she simply insisted that it *seem* to—at least within her range. And had always won, because it was easier to do it that way—Alice having such a very small and narrow range.

But not I, thought Sarah. No, not I!

"I *thought* you were glad I was leaving," she said flatly.

"Not for my sake," said Jeff, too quickly. "But I want you to be busy and forget. Live your own life, Aunt Sarah." He was smiling, but she didn't like either the look or the sound of him. "You have always told me that I ought to live mine."

Forget? thought Sarah, bristling within. Even poor Alice deserved better than to be forgotten as fast as possible. Furthermore, it *isn't* possible. Alice was what she was, and she will remain a part of our lives as long as we live.

"Oh, I say a good many things," she admitted. "For better or for worse, I have always been one to trot out what's on my mind. Well, then, right now, I keep having this nagging feeling that there is something that I *ought* to say. Or do. Or know."

"All you have to do is be yourself," said Jeff, somewhat fatuously. He patted her hand. "It'll be nice to see Del. She doesn't mind three hundred miles in one day, and the same again tomorrow."

"That sort of thing doesn't bother Del," said Mrs. Brady lightly, seeing clearly that her nephew was getting rid of her.

She refused Jeff's offer to send her home in a cab, insisting that she enjoyed the bus ride. On one of her good days, the truth was, she certainly did. But she wasn't feeling as well now as she might.

When Jeff kissed her brow goodbye and said, pseudo-gaily, "Don't you worry about a thing," Mrs. Brady was contrarily convinced that there was something she *ought* to worry about.

She stood on the sidewalk and listened to one word turn into

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another in her mind. "Handled"? No, she was being "spared." Well! She, Sarah Brady, was not going to stand for being "spared!" Not yet and not ever—not if she could help it.

Mrs. Brady walked back into the drug store to look in the phone book, but there were several Dr. Clarkes. She had no clue. Then the druggist hailed her. "Anything else I can do for you, today, Mrs. Brady?"

"Please, Mr. Fredericks, do you happen to know which Dr. Clarke took care of my sister?"

"Surely. Dr. Josephus Clarke. You want his phone number?"

"I want his address," she said thoughtfully.

"He's in the same building where your Dr. Crane used to be."

"Oh, is he? Thank you." Now Mrs. Brady had her bearings.

Then the druggist said, "I was sure sorry to hear about your sister. A long illness, I guess." Was he, too, delicately implying cause for rejoicing?

Mrs. Brady came into the doctor's waiting room, feeling like a dirty spy. The girl who took her name seemed totally confused to hear that she wasn't a patient. Mrs. Brady had to wait out the doctor's appointments for almost two hours.

So she sat and turned the leaves of old magazines, and watched the people come and go, and pondered how to ask a question, when it was the question that she wanted to find out. Or whether there was one.

At last she was given her five minutes. "I am Mrs. Conley's sister, Sarah Brady."

"We met," the doctor said, "in sad and unfortunate circumstances. What can I do for you. Mrs. Brady?" He was benign.

"I don't know. You could tell me, please, *why* my sister died on Monday."

"Why? I . . . don't quite understand."

"I mean, should we have suspected?"

"Oh, no. Certainly not," said the doctor. "I see. I see. You have been feeling that you should have been at her side? That's a very common feeling, Mrs. Brady, but it really isn't rational. I'm sure you know what I mean." He was tolerant, gentle.

"You took care of her, as they say, for a long time?" She was groping.

The doctor said, with a sad smile, "I did all I could, Mrs. Brady."

"Of course you did," she burst out. "I'm not here to hint that you didn't. But what did my sister die of? Maybe that's how I should have put it."

"How shall I tell you?" He seemed to be countering. He was watching her, quite warily. "In a lay term? Heart failure? . . . I don't quite understand what troubles, you, Mrs. Brady. But if you like, I can assure you that there

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is no need for you to be troubled—no need at all. We must accept these things."

"Dr. Clarke, I am *not* like my sister."

He made no direct response to this. "It is very easy to imagine things, in grief," he went on. "But when you have a bit of a heart problem, as you do, it is wise to learn serenity."

"I have a very good doctor," she snapped, "who has taught me to deal with my heart."

"I'm sure you have."

"Perhaps you know him? Dr. Crane?"

"By reputation. A very good man," he purred. "You are looking well."

Mrs. Brady shook her feathers. She was making a fine mess out of this interview. But the doctor was not. He was "handling" her expertly. In fact, he was getting rid of her. Expertly. Like Jeff.

Mrs. Brady found the old familiar bus stop. She supposed she must have put his back up, as the expression goes. I, said Sarah Brady to herself, am a terrible detective.

Well, it wasn't her *way*, to go snooping around corners and behind people's backs. It just never *had* been her way and she didn't really know how to do it. She, too, was what she was—a vinegary old soul—and her whole past wasn't going to let her be anything else. In the meantime, she hadn't found out a single blessed thing.

Wait. She had. Dr. Clarke had been told that *she*, Sarah, had a heart problem. Now, why was he told that?

Ah, now she was *sure* that she was being "spared" and "handled" and it was beginning to make her good and mad.

She almost trotted the three blocks to the house, brisk with anger, and had steam left over to pack her things with great dispatch. Then Del roared into the driveway. And when Del came, in her long-legged still puppylike way, there was a lift in the atmosphere. Something about Del. She was a young mother now, with a house of her own to run. But Del refused to be anything but cheerful. *She* didn't have to be tactful. It was impossible to be offended by her—Del was as open as the day.

"Sorry I couldn't make it to Aunt Alice's funeral," she said, "but Georgie was down with chicken pox. Sally isn't due to get them till Tuesday. So here I am. Hi, kids!"

Bobby and Suzanne regarded Del with a kind of suspicious delight. Dinner was almost easy.

Afterward, Del began to yawn. She said she went to bed with the sun these days. Why fight it? Her kids were up and roistering every dawn.

But Mrs. Brady didn't want Del to leave her side until she had said what she was going to say. She would still tear some veils. There was that anger still in her, still energizing her.

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She said, rather abruptly, to the assembly in the living room, "I won't have another chance. So I want to ask you, right here and now, what's going on in this house? I've been poking around all day, trying to find out what's been hanging over my head. But I'm no detective. So now I am *asking*. Why are you keeping secrets from me? What have I ever done to make you insult me by keeping the truth away from me?"

"Why, Mama!" said Del, with nothing but surprise.

Jeff looked at Mrs. Brady with a reddening face. The others seemed to hold their breath. "I am sorry," Jeff said stiffly, "if you feel we've been insulting you, Aunt Sarah. That's the last thing any of us would want to do."

"Oh, Aunt Sarah," said Karen with gentle woe, "how can it be an insult to try not to keep talking about unhappy things?"

"I don't want to talk about unhappy things *because* they are unhappy," said Sarah. "I know how Alice trained you all—to keep unhappy things outside her door. But I don't like things kept outside *my* door—*any* things. And, as far as I know, I don't deserve to be treated this way."

Jeff was looking stricken and his wife put her hand on his knee. "Oh, Aunt Sarah, dear," she said softly, "you mustn't, you really mustn't. I'm so sorry that you feel as you do. I wish you didn't. Del?" She looked to Del for help.

But Del said, "I don't know what Mom's talking about."

"Neither do I," said Suzanne abruptly, from the heap she was on a floor cushion.

Mrs. Brady kept sternly to her course. "I want to know why you are all handling me with kid gloves. In fact, I think I want to know exactly what happened here on Monday."

"Children," said Karen, "she's had a shock. She's—"

But Bobby sat up in his chair and used his spine. "I know what she means," the boy said.

Mrs. Brady nodded to her unexpected ally. Karen's hands were moving in a protective flutter, but now Jeffrey said, "The fact is, we can't be quite sure what did happen. If we chose not to tell you of a certain possibility, that was because it is very distressing to think about, and it certainly need not be true."

"There," said Karen. "Now, surely, that is no insult. When is it an insult to be kind? Del, dear, would you like something to eat or drink, before bed?"

Del said cheerfully, "You won't brush her off that easily."

And Jeffrey said painfully, "No, I guess not."

Karen said, "Oh, Jeff, this is *too* bad. Oh, please, all of you. Let it go. It's all over. There is nothing anybody can do or even really *know*."

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But Bobby said, "I guess you'd better tell us, Dad."

And Suzanne said, with a burst of anger, "Don't you think we can take it?"

And Mrs. Brady was nodding and sparkling her approval. These kids will do, she thought.

So Jeffrey lifted his head and spoke in a blurting way. "All right. There is a possibility that my mother took her own life."

"Doesn't the doctor know that?" asked Del, breaking the silent moment of shock with an air of intelligent interest.

Karen said, "No, No. That is, he suspects that she may have had too much of her medicine. By accident. Or just in ignorance. He doesn't know, you see, that she happened to be feeling rather upset and hurt that day."

Bobby was on his feet. "Oh, come on, Dad! You know darned well Grandmother never would have cared *that* much. So you told her you were taking off to Europe—so what? Listen, *she* knew she'd have a ball, bossing a crew of nurses and telling everybody how you ran out on her. Well, it's the truth!" He looked around, belligerently.

Suzanne said, "She was spoiled rotten—we all know that. But nothing was going to get *her* down."

Karen said, "Oh, my dears. Oh, I don't think this is very kind. You are making your father feel very bad. None of us want him feeling any worse. Please?"

Del said, "I don't see what you're all so upset about."

And Karen said, "There now. That is *very* sensible. Isn't it?"

"It certainly is," snapped Mrs. Brady. "You haven't said a word so far that was worth keeping secret. You think she might have, in one of her moods, taken too much medicine on purpose? But the doctor thinks not? I can't see anything in *that* worth lying to me about."

"But we can't *know*," said Karen, "and why should *you* be worried?"

Mrs. Brady answered in ringing tones. "Why not? I'm alive."

Her nephew looked at her and said, "I beg your pardon, Aunt Sarah. We should have told you. I think you knew that your heart medicine is the same as hers? And you knew that her pills were very much weaker than yours—almost placebos, in fact? Karen spoke to you of that, didn't she? The day you unpacked."

"Yes."

"Well, my mother evidently crossed over to your room on Monday, took your bottle of pills, got back into bed, and then swallowed enough to be too many for her. She took them herself—no doubt of that. So it just seemed—after the doctor had gone—"

Jeff began to flounder. "When we found—we didn't want to—we felt—" He put his hands over his eyes. "For Bobby's sake, who didn't notice that she crossed the hall, and for your sake, Aunt Sarah, who *did*

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encourage me to tell my mother I was going away—well, we saw no reason, since we can't be *sure* of the truth, why you should be tortured by this doubt."

"By which *you* are being tortured?" said Mrs. Brady. Then she closed her mouth and set herself to manage her treacherous heart.

"It is perfectly possible—in fact, it is probable," Jeff said, straining to believe, "that she forgot. Or never realized that your pills were so much stronger. It may have been just that her own supply was low—"

Del said alertly, "Mama?"

Sarah Brady had shrunken in the chair. She was hunched there like a little old monkey, and the agitation of her heart was now visible to all.

Her daughter came to her and said again, "Mama?"

"Get my handbag—pills," Mrs. Brady mumbled through numb lips.

Karen said, "Oh, Aunt Sarah!" She clapped her hands and called, "Henny! Bring a glass of water—quickly." She stood by Mrs. Brady and her nurse's fingers felt for the pulse. Sarah kept breathing as slowly and as deeply as she could.

Bobby said, "Listen, everybody! If I'd seen her, which I didn't, I wouldn't have known to *do* anything. It's a lot of malarkey! Keeping stuff from *me*."

Suzanne said, "Listen, if Grandmother had *wanted* to kill herself she'd have done it. What's the difference how? But I'll never believe she *did* do it."

Henny was there and Del ran up with the handbag. Del grabbed the glass of water, pushing Karen away. Mrs. Brady swallowed a pill, then some water, and sighed.

In a few moments she said, "How do you know she took *my* pills?"

"Oh, Miz Sarah," wailed Henny, "Why did you have to find out about that? It was me who saw your bottle under her bed—after the doctor went."

"And who," said Mrs. Brady, lifting her voice a little, but not looking up, "put it back in my room?"

"Me," said Henny. "Miz Karen, she recognized it. And she said—and Mr. Conley, he felt so terrible—so they both said, Well, the *least* said the better. *I* didn't want you to feel bad, either." Henny was ready to weep. "Listen, you got to pray Miz Alice didn't sin, not that way."

Mrs. Brady shook her head. "Jeff, did you see this bottle, *my* bottle, on Monday?"

"Yes, I saw it." Her nephew bent forward, alarmed for her. "Now, don't worry, Aunt Sarah—forget it. We shouldn't have told you."

Mrs. Brady could feel her blood beginning to flow less turbulently.

"I can't," she said. "I can't forget it. My bottle was downtown when Alice died—I *know* it was!"

"Why, no," said Jeff. "I'm sorry, Aunt Sarah, it couldn't have been—it was under Alice's bed."

"I *was* surprised," said Mrs.

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Brady in a stronger voice, "to see so many of my pills gone at noon. But I carry Dr. Crane's prescription with me all the time, so after Karen left me and went to the dentist, I dropped into Mr. Fredericks' drug store."

In the silence that followed, she looked only at Karen.

"Oh, but then *she* must have—" said Karen. "Poor Alice must have—"

Mrs. Brady sighed again. No. Definitely not. Alice, dead, had put no bottle under her deathbed.

She said, without anger, "I guess you wouldn't have talked them quite so desperately into 'sparing' me if you hadn't finally noticed Mr. Fredericks' name and *Monday's date* on this label? Oh, Karen, I told you I had an errand to do on Monday!"

No one spoke.

"When did Henny find it where you put it?" Mrs. Brady pressed on. "After I'd brought it back from Fredericks' drug store, of course. But by that time Alice was already dead of what you'd given her. At noon, was it, before we went downtown, when *you* took away her tray?"

"No," said Jeff. "No. *No!*"

"If there is another secret around," said Aunt Sarah sadly, "please trot it out."

In a moment Karen said sullenly. "She's buried. Now we can go to Europe. We can all live, for a change." The skin of her face was suddenly mottled, and her eyes had clouded over. "She was going to raise such a fuss. Jeff wouldn't have stood up to it—he'd have given in, the way he always did. She wasn't any good, even to herself. You all know that. *I* had to take it, all day, every day. You can call it mercy."

But no one was calling it mercy. The two children had drawn close to their father. Henny went to stand behind them. Jeffrey Conley stared at his second wife with wide and terrified eyes.

"You can do what you want," whined Karen viciously, "but you had all better stop and think. What good will it do to let the truth out now?"

The room was still, without an answer.

Mrs. Brady took another sip of water, although her heart felt steadier now as she sensed the old familiar comfort that always sustained her.

"The quality of truth," she said, "is that it's really there. Poor Alice taught me that."

It was Del who said, "I'll call the police—it has to be done. I'll do it."

Poor Karen.

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The creator of Perry Mason now offers you an entirely different type of detective . . . Meet Sheriff Bill Eldon of Rookville, California—slow, relaxed, his voice drawling, his manner elaborately casual—a kindly and sympathetic man—a meditative man—a man who can say (and mean every syllable), "I don't ever aim to back up from anything I think is right."

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THE CLUE OF THE HUNGRY HORSE

by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

IT WAS 7:55 WHEN LEW TURLOCK answered the phone and was advised that long distance was calling Miss Betty Turlock. Would he please put her on the phone?

"She isn't here."

The voice of the operator had that synthetic sweetness which showed Lew Turlock he was talking directly with the city. The Rockville operator would have spoken more naturally. Sometimes the local girls tried to imitate the voices of the metropolitan operators, but it never quite clicked, probably because they overdid it.

"When will she be in?" came drifting dulcetly over the party line.

Lew called over his shoulder to his wife, "Betty wasn't coming home tonight, was she, Millie?"

"She's spending the night with Rose Marie Mallard," his wife called. "Who wants her?"

"Long distance," Turlock said to his wife and then into the phone, "She won't be here tonight."

"Is there another number where we can reach her?"

"Nope," Turlock said, "no other number. The folks out where she's staying don't have a telephone."

Originally appeared in the book entitled "Two Clues," by Erle Stanley Gardner. *Copyright 1947 by Erle Stanley Gardner. Permission to reprint granted by the publisher, William Morrow and Company, Inc.*

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He hung up and went back to a perusal of the *Rockville Gazette.*

"Now who in the world do you suppose would be calling Betty from the city?" Mrs. Turlock asked.

Her husband merely grunted.

"Seems as though you could have found out who it was," she said. "Betty wouldn't sleep a wink if she knew someone was trying to get her from the city."

Lew started to say something, then lowered his paper and cocked his head, listening.

"What is it?" his wife asked.

"Those horses over at Calhoun's," Turlock said, "they're acting mighty queer. A lot of snorting and stamping."

"Well," Mrs. Turlock said tartly, "let Sid Rowan worry about that. We've got enough to do without worrying about the neighbors' horses. Sid's getting lazier every day. Anyhow, I don't see how you can hear them. I can't hear a thing."

Turlock said shortly, "Just guess my ears are tuned to horse noises. That mare of Lorraine Calhoun's is a package of dynamite. Sounds like she's kicking the side of her stall."

With the boom in land values Lew's next-door neighbor had sold out six months ago to Carl Carver Calhoun, a wealthy broker. It had been difficult for Turlock to adjust himself to this new situation. In the first place, Calhoun was only there on week-ends. He had hired Sid Rowan and his wife to look after the place, paying a salary that Turlock was firmly convinced was exactly twice as much as any couple were worth, four times as much as Rowan was worth.

Under the new owner the adjoining property had undergone a steady transformation. The cattle and work horses had been sold, and high-spirited riding horses had taken their place. A couple of dairy cows had been retained and a half dozen head of beef cattle, but the rest had been sold. A tennis court had been built and a swimming pool was now in process of construction.

Calhoun was cordial enough. In fact, he went out of his way to be friendly. But, as Turlock had pointed out to his wife, you just couldn't make a real neighbor out of a millionaire. "Go over to borrow a cup of rice," he had pointed out, "and when you went to pay it back, like as not they'd smile and say, 'Oh, that's all right.' "

The telephone rang again.

This time the voice of the long-distance telephone operator announced that her party would speak with anyone who answered the phone. A second later, a girl's voice, touched with impatience, asked, "Who is this talking, please?"

"Lew Turlock."

"Oh, you're Betty's father, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Look, would you do something for me?"

"What is it?"

"You don't know me. I'm Irma

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Jessup, a friend of Lorraine Calhoun and also of your daughter. Now listen, it's very important that I talk with Betty. I have to reach her no matter where she is."

"There isn't a phone out where she's staying."

"I understand. But is it far from where you are?"

"Six or seven miles."

"Look, could you get word to her? Or perhaps some neighbor who has a phone would call her? Couldn't you get word to her *some* way?"

"Well, I suppose I could," Turlock said reluctantly, "if it's downright important."

"Well, it is. Just tell her to call Irma Jessup at Trinidad 6273. And she'll be using a neighbor's telephone, won't she?"

"Yes."

"Then tell her to reverse the charges so there won't be any trouble about that. Tell her I'll be waiting right here at the telephone."

"You want to give me that number again?"

The voice was impatient with the delay and Lew Turlock's stupidity. "It's a pay station, Trinidad 6273. Tell her that Irma Jessup wants her to call at once. I'll be waiting by the telephone. She may call me collect. Now is that plain?"

Turlock sighed. "That's plain," he said. "Goodbye."

"What is it?" Mrs. Turlock called from the living room as Turlock hung up the phone.

"Oh, some friend of the Calhouns —girl by the name of Irma Jessup— says she has to get Betty right away. It's terribly important. I suppose it's an invitation to a theater party or something. Don't know why I didn't make her tell me what it was all about."

"You aren't going out there, Lew?"

"I think Jim Thornton will run over and get her for me. It's only a quarter of a mile from his place over there . . . Say, what do you suppose is the matter with those horses? Guess I'd better go take a look. Don't see any lights over there. I s'pose Sid Rowan and his wife have gone to the movies again."

"Oh, quit worrying about the horses," Mrs. Turlock said. "You can't do your work and Sid's too."

"You know Jim Thornton's number?" Turlock called to his wife.

"Six seven four—ring three."

"Okay."

Turlock picked up the telephone. When he had Jim Thornton on the line, he said, "Jim, this is Lew Turlock. I hate to bother you, but Betty's staying over with Rose Marie Mallard tonight. Long distance is trying to get her and says it's real important. Now, do you suppose you could . . ."

"Sure thing," Thornton said. "I'll get 'em over here right away."

"It ain't too much trouble?"

"Shucks, no. I have a signal with them. I put up an old automobile spotlight on the side of the house. It's pointed right toward their win-

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dows and whenever someone wants one of them on the phone, I turn on that spotlight. It may take a few minutes for them to see it, but usually someone comes right over. Usually it's Rose Marie. I'll switch on the light right away, Lew. How's everything coming?"

"So-so."

"Don't want to sell that Jersey milk cow, do you? I know a man who's trying to buy up some good cows, willing to pay a good price."

"How much?"

Thornton's voice became suddenly cautious, indicating his recognition of the fact that they were talking on a party line. "Remember my telling you what I got for that bay horse?"

"Uh huh."

"Well, he's offered five dollars less than that for the right sort of cows."

"I'll think it over. Probably be seeing you tomorrow."

"Okay. Be seeing you."

Turlock hung up. Within a matter of five minutes the phone was ringing again.

"That'll be Betty now," Mrs. Turlock said.

Lew Turlock put down his paper and walked patiently over to the telephone. When Betty was home, she always answered the telephone. When she was away, her father took over the job. Mrs. Turlock had a slight impediment of hearing which, as she expressed it, "Made the words sound all blurred over the telephone." But there were those who claimed she could hear all right when it came to listening in on party-line conversations.

Lew Turlock picked up the receiver and said, "Hello."

The voice which came rushing at him over the wire showed all of the nervous rapidity of a person who has an explanation to make and is very anxious to be certain the explanation is accepted.

"Oh, Mr. Turlock," the voice pleaded. "This is Rose Marie. Betty isn't here right now. She's going to join me a little later. There was something came up. She is coming out almost . . . well, almost any time now. If you can leave the message, I'll see that she gets it."

Lew Turlock gripped the telephone receiver. He started to ask a question and then realized that there were other ears on the party line. This would make a choice morsel of gossip. Magnified, distorted, repeated, it would brand his daughter as a girl who resorted to the familiar expedient of saying she was spending a night with a girl friend who would give her an alibi and then . . .

Lew Turlock fought to keep his voice casual. "Tell her Irma Jessup called up and wants Betty to call back just as soon as she possibly can. She's to put the call through collect. Trinidad 6273. That's all. I'm sorry I bothered you but Irma Jessup said it was terribly important. I told her that I couldn't reach Betty until later on in the evening."

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"Okay. I'll . . . I'll tell her—" Rose Marie stammered.

"Thanks," Lew interrupted, keeping his voice casual, and hung up.

It took two or three seconds for him to compose himself sufficiently to walk back to the living room and face his wife. But Mrs. Turlock was engrossed in her book and barely looked up. She took it for granted that Rose Marie had promised to drive back to her home and relay the message to Betty.

Lew stood, debating just what to do next. His mind was a turmoil of thought, but all the time he was fighting to keep his manner and speech completely casual.

Across on the Calhoun place a horse snorted and kicked. The wind was from the east, carrying the sound plainly. Lew Turlock welcomed it as a diversion. "I'm going across and take a look at those horses," he said. "One of them may have a foot caught or something."

"Sid Rowan certainly doesn't believe in doing any more work than is necessary to get by," Mrs. Turlock snorted. "I can't say that I like the idea of having neighbors who go away and leave the place in the hands of someone like Sid Rowan. After all, the Calhouns aren't there over five or six days a month. And when they are, there's a continual screeching and shouting."

"I know," Lew said, and opened the table drawer to take out a flashlight. "I'll be back in five or ten minutes."

As Lew Turlock crossed the kitchen and opened the back door, his wife was saying something about Sid Rowan traipsing off to a movie three or four nights a week and delegating his responsibilities to the neighbors. Having warmed to this subject of conversation, she found it more interesting than her book.

Turlock quietly closed the back door, shutting off his wife's tirade.

The boundary line between the Turlock and Calhoun properties ran directly across the crest of a commanding knoll. For this reason the houses were nearer together than would otherwise have been the case, each builder desiring to take advantage of the view and the cool breezes.

Using the beam of his flashlight to guide him, Lew Turlock crossed the narrow strip of lawn, opened the gate in the fence, and approached the Calhoun barn.

It had been raining earlier in the day, but now the clouds had broken up. The stars were gleaming brightly, interrupted only by an occasional blotch of drifting clouds. The air, washed clean of impurities by the rain, felt cool and crisp. The smell of damp earth was a delightful aroma in Turlock's nostrils. It exerted a quieting influence, stilling somewhat the thoughts which raced around and around in his brain like a weary squirrel wheel of worry.

Lew Turlock knew he must make some excuse to get out to George

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Mallard's place. Somehow, he must get Rose Marie off to one side and quiz her before she had had a chance to get in touch with Betty and fix up some story. That, Turlock decided, was the Calhoun influence. Lorraine Calhoun's smilingly superior manners had started all the girls putting on airs, trying to be sophisticated. Take Rosemary, for instance, who had ceased to be plain "Rosemary" but must now be called Rose Marie. Her parents had no business letting her get away with that stuff. If he'd been her father . . .

Lew, walking doggedly toward the barn, his mind occupied with his own problems, noticed that the beam of his flashlight was reflected back at him from the chrome finish on a convertible car, parked almost in front of the stable door.

He let the light play over the car. It was Lorraine Calhoun's convertible. The top was down, showing the red leather of the interior—a car, Lew thought morosely, that cost more than a Diesel tractor—and used just as a plaything—to speed a rich man's daughter around on her playtime engagements.

A horse snorted and kicked.

Lew Turlock opened the barn door. Somewhere at the back of the barn a horse gave a low nicker in appreciation of the human companionship.

Turlock, accustomed to sensing the moods of animals, detected the tension all up and down the long line of stalls. The horses were nervous, as though a thunderstorm had been approaching.

A horse snorted. Lew could hear the iron ring turn in its hasp as the horse lunged back on the rope. Then there was the sound of nervous hoofs on the wood floor of the stall and another long snort.

Lew found the light switch and clicked on the lights.

With the blaze of illumination the horses instantly became silent.

Lew's eyes, running down the long line of stalls, caught sight of a girl's leg and a high-heeled shoe, the toe pointed slightly upward. Beyond that, he could see part of a hand stretched out palm upward.

Even in that first moment of soul-numbing excitement, Turlock remembered about the horses. He mustn't alarm them. He spoke to them automatically as he hurried down the line of stalls. "Whoa, boys, take it easy. Steady now."

She was lying on her side, sprawled out grotesquely, in such a position that the mare had to stand at an angle to avoid trampling on the still body.

The cruel, disfiguring wound in the top of her head, with the sinister red pool seeping from it onto the stable floor, told its own story.

Lew gave a strangled cry, "Betty!"

He knelt by the girl, then noticed her clothes. They were not Betty's clothes.

"Miss Calhoun—Lorraine," he said.

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The figure lay starkly still. Lew touched the arm.

It needed only that one touch of the lifeless flesh to tell Lew Turlock that nothing he could do would be of any use.

He left the body exactly as he had found it, but he carefully stepped over it, untied the mare and led her out.

The nervous mare drew back on the rope as she came to the sprawled figure, then reared and jumped, alighting with a pound of hoofs on the floor beyond.

Lew tied her up and then went to the extension telephone which Calhoun had had installed in his barn within the last two weeks.

Sheriff Bill Eldon received the call at his home. He was, at the moment, suffering through one of the frequent visits of his wife's sister, Doris. Time did not dull the sharpness of her mind—or of her tongue.

The Sheriff listened to Lew Turlock's heavy voice stolidly giving him the details.

"You say she was kicked by the mare?"

"That's what it looked like. She must have gone into the stall and the mare caught her right in the middle of the forehead."

"You didn't move her?"

"Well, I got her out of that stall."

"You shouldn't have done that, Lew. You should have left the body . . ."

"Not the body," Lew said, "the mare. She was stomping around and all excited."

"You didn't move the body?"

"Shucks, no. The mare jumped over it slick as could be. I knew enough not to touch the body. So did the mare."

"How about the Calhouns? Are they home?" the Sheriff asked.

"No, no one's home. Sid Rowan and his wife must have gone to the show."

"Okay," the Sheriff said. "I'll get the Coroner and come out. I'll call up the theater and tell them to put a message on the screen for Sid Rowan to get out there right away. See that no one touches anything. G'bye."

Doris Nelson was sitting in the front parlor, straining her ears to listen. She waited only to hear the click of the receiver and then rasped out, "Who is it? Who's killed? What happened?"

Grinning maliciously, the Sheriff picked up the receiver again. His second call would give him a valid excuse to ignore the questions. He said to the operator, "Get me James Logan, the Coroner, right away. It's official and important."

A few moments later the Sheriff had notified the Coroner, called the movie theater, and left instructions to have Sid Rowan called from the show. Then he had slipped out of the side door and got his car out of the driveway—all without answering Doris' rapid-fire staccato of

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eager questions, in itself no small feat.

Logan, the Coroner, and Lew Turlock both lived well to the south of town. The Turlock ranch was some five miles out, and the Sheriff, taking it for granted that Logan would be there ahead of him, drove at conservative speed along the main street of Rockville, carefully regarding the rights of other cars that were on the road. Although he had switched on his official red spotlight, he refrained from using the siren. After all, there was nothing he could do. The girl was dead.

The Calhouns were prominent people. There would be quite a bit of publicity over the thing. The city newspapers would probably telephone in for complete facts. The Calhoun girl was pretty as a picture. But she was a city girl, and she should have known better than to go prowling around a nervous mare at night.

Once south of town, the Sheriff speeded up the car and rolled briskly along the pavement. As he turned off on the dirt road which led up to the hill where the two houses were situated, he noticed that there were several fresh car tracks just ahead of him and that one of the puddles left in the road was still churned with yellowish muddy water. This meant that the Coroner would be there ahead of him.

The Sheriff liked that. He was always nervous when he had to stand around waiting for the Coroner. He turned up the driveway, which skirted the base of the hill, then climbed up to the knoll, and slid his car to a stop just behind that of the Coroner.

Logan was already in the barn. The Sheriff walked on in.

Logan said, "I've looked around, Bill. It's evidently accidental. She went into the stall to get something and the mare kicked her. It must have happened right after the horses were fed. The mare got nervous with the body lying there and didn't eat a bite. The chute is still filled with hay. That mare's hot-blooded and nervous. Miss Calhoun probably didn't know enough about horses to understand she had to speak to a horse when she entered the stall. She walked in without saying a word. The mare saw her out of the corner of her eye and let fly."

"How long's she been dead?" the Sheriff asked.

"We can find out when Sid Rowan comes and tells us what time he fed the horses. Must've happened within five minutes of the time he put down the feed. This probably will be Sid now."

A car drew up outside. A man and woman got out and entered the stable.

"What's the trouble here?" Sid Rowan said, his voice showing irritation. "Can't I get away to a movie without . . ."

He broke off as the Sheriff stepped forward.

Rowan was in the middle fifties,

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a stringy, wiry man with steel-gray eyes, long of leg and arm but quick-moving despite an awkward shuffle about his walk. His wife was four or five years younger and inclined to be fleshy and slow-moving.

The Sheriff told them what had happened.

"But she wasn't here," Rowan said. "There was no one here. No one was home. The family were coming down tomorrowl You know how it is. They used to come down every week-end, now they come down about two week-ends out of the month, the whole bunch of them —servants, family, friends. Three or four automobile-loads sometimes. Shucks, wait a minute, that's her car parked out there now. She must have come down unexpected like."

"You didn't know she was here?"

"Why, no. I didn't look for her until tomorrow. They're all coming then."

"You have no idea what time she got here?"

"No."

"You must have fed the horses and then gone to the movies as soon as you had the hay down."

"That's right. I went up and put hay in the chutes and then the missus and I beat it for the first show. No sense in sticking around here all the time. You can't make a man work both day and night."

"You must have fed at about half-past six if you made the first show?"

"I started about half-past six. Guess I finished about twenty minutes of seven and took right off."

"It was dark in the barn by that time?"

"Sure."

"And you switched on the lights?"

"Of course."

"And then turned them off when you left?"

"That's right."

"Did she have a key to the house?"

"I suppose so. Sure. Calhoun had keys made for all members of the family."

"Do you live in the house or . . ."

"No. There's an apartment over the garage where the wife and I live."

Logan said, "Well, we don't know *why* she came to the stable, but it's a cinch she came here, walked in, and the mare kicked her."

Sid Rowan nodded.

"I'm not so sure," Sheriff Eldon said.

They looked at him quizzically. "How else could it have happened, Bill?" the coroner asked.

Bill Eldon turned to Turlock.

"You heard the horses snorting?" the Sheriff asked.

"That's right. This mare was making quite a commotion. Snorting and stamping and occasionally kicking at the side of the stall. She wanted out."

"She was tied up with a rope?"

"That's right. A halter and a rope through that iron ring."

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"How long had you been hearing that racket before you came over?"

"Must have been half an hour anyway. Maybe longer."

"You called me at eight twenty-five," the Sheriff said. "I made a note of the time."

"Well, I called you within five minutes of the time I got over here."

"Now then, when you got here," the Sheriff said, "the stable was dark?"

"That's right."

"You had a flashlight and located the light switch and turned on the lights?"

"Yes."

"And the body was lying here on the floor?"

"That's right."

The Sheriff turned to Logan. "There you are."

"I don't get it," Logan told him.

"Rowan left the place at twenty minutes to seven," the Sheriff said. "It was dark by that time. The sun sets right around six o'clock. Inside the barn it was dark as a pocket. You couldn't see your way around without lights. Now then, if this young woman entered the barn, she naturally turned on the lights to see where she was going. Who turned off those lights?"

"Gosh, Bill, you've got something there," the Coroner said. "There must have been someone with her."

"That's right, someone who turned off the lights."

Logan gave a low whistle.

"*After* this had happened," the Sheriff went on.

Logan looked at Rowan. "No chance she got in while you were feeding the horses and then when you went out—"

"Not a chance in the world," Rowan interrupted half-angrily.

Logan motioned toward the horse's manger. "The horse hasn't hardly touched a bit of food . . . This is Lorraine Calhoun, Rowan?"

"Sure. She must have driven up right after I left. After I came down that ladder from the loft, I remember looking in at the mare. She'd just started to eat."

The Sheriff avoided the body by hugging the edge of the stall. He walked in to the manger and said, "The chute's pretty well clogged up with hay. That mare didn't even pull the hay away from the bottom of the chute so the rest of it could come down."

The Sheriff picked up half a dozen of the dried barley stalks and looked at the quality of hay with a professional eye. "Lots of grain on this hay," he said. "It's pretty good . . . Hello, what's *this?*"

His flashlight exploring the far corner of the manger disclosed a small black leather-covered book, blending so perfectly with the shadows in the manger that it took the beam of the flashlight to disclose it.

Bill Eldon picked up the book and turned his body so the light struck the pages. "Seems to be a diary,"

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he said. "Her name's in front—Lorraine Calhoun. Logan, if you don't mind, I think I'll get Quinlan to take some photographs of the position of that body. Let's try not to touch anything until he gets down here."

The Sheriff moved over directly under the light. Opening the diary, he said, "Gosh, I hate to pry into this thing. Guess we won't read it, boys."

He started to put it in his pocket and then said, "Well, we might take a look at the *last* entry in it. It may tell us something."

The Sheriff turned to the current date, opened the diary, and read, "*I guess some people think I'm a fool. I'm going to have a showdown with Frank and that mealy-mouthed Betty tomorrow. Well, why wait? Why not catch . . .*"

That ended the last entry in the diary.

The Sheriff abruptly closed the book and put it in his pocket. He turned to Lew Turlock. "Where's Betty tonight, Lew?" he asked casually.

Lew Turlock fidgeted uneasily. He glanced over toward his house, and then his eyes met the curious gaze of James Logan, Sid Rowan, and Rowan's wife.

"Sheriff," he blurted, "could I speak with you alone—sort of private like?"

Over in the dark corner of the barn Lew Turlock told the Sheriff the story of his daughter's deception.

"Told you she was going out with the Mallard girl, did she?" the Sheriff asked.

Turlock nodded miserably. "She and Rosemary—or Rose Marie she's calling herself now—were supposed to be working on some stuff they're doing in this benefit play for the Red Cross. She left right after supper."

"What time?"

"Well, Millie had dinner early so Betty could get away. I guess Betty left the place about—well, about six. She helped her mother with the dishes. But she was all ready to go except for that. Soon as she dried the dishes she jumped in the car and drove away."

"And Mallard hasn't any telephone?"

"That's right. I called up by getting Jim Thornton to signal him to come over to the phone. Betty's a *good* girl. I don't know what it's all about. Probably some kid stuff. But if word gets around that Betty's supposed to be there, but ain't—well, you can look at Sid Rowan's wife, standing over there with her ears stuck out a foot—"

"Come on," the Sheriff said. "We're going out to Mallard's place right quick."

He called back over his shoulder, "Lew Turlock and I are going out to see if his daughter saw Lorraine tonight. She's visiting friends who haven't any phone. Jim, will you

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get in touch with George Quinlan and ask him to come down and take some pictures of that body and the stall? Make everyone keep back away from the body!"

The Sheriff opened the door of the county car and Lew Turlock, miserably dejected, climbed in beside the Sheriff. "Gosh, Bill," he said, "you know how easy it is to get talk started around here. Particularly with someone like Sid Rowan's wife. She's all burned up with curiosity right now."

"I know," Bill Eldon said sympathetically.

"Matter of fact, I thought there for a minute it was Betty lying dead in the barn. The light's down at the far end, and what with the shadows in the stall and the body lying sort of half face-down—you can imagine how I felt. Hang it, Bill, Betty is all right. I don't know what the explanation is, but—"

"Sure, sure," the Sheriff soothed. "You're getting yourself all worried, Lew. Betty's all right, but if this Lorraine Calhoun was going to see her tonight, we'd sort of ought to talk with Betty. I haven't ever met any of these Calhouns. Too bad a thing like this had to happen. Guess the country's changing, Lew. Must have been fifty little ranches sold to city people. Some of the folks are going to farm, but most of 'em are just using 'em for sort of week-end residences."

His manner casual, his voice drawling characteristically, the Sheriff talked on, steering the conversation away from the gnawing worry that was eating away at Turlock's mind.

They passed Jim Thornton's house, rolled on down the dirt road another quarter of a mile, and then turned into Mallard's place.

George Mallard came out to meet them.

The Sheriff did the talking, for which Lew Turlock was duly grateful. And the Sheriff was diplomatic, asking about the crops, discussing the prospects of early rains, and then casually asking whether Rosemary was home.

"Rose *Marie*," Mallard corrected him with a grin. "She's gone a little highfalutin on us. No, she ain't home. Someone telephoned to her about three quarters of an hour ago maybe, and she jumped in the car and went tearing out."

The Sheriff was elaborately casual. "Well, that's all right," he said. "She's going to be in that Red Cross play next month, isn't she?"

"That's right."

"She and Betty Turlock."

"Uh huh."

"Kind of want to see her about the play," the Sheriff said. "Haven't any idea where she went, have you, George?"

"No, I haven't. You know the way youngsters are these days. She came tearing in, grabbed her hat and coat, bounced into the car, and tore out of the driveway. These

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kids have more on their minds these days than the Governor of the state."

The Sheriff started the motor on his car. "Well, I'll be seeing you, George, I'm kinda busy right now. Tell your daughter just as soon as she comes in to call my house. No, wait a minute . . . You tell her to jump in the car and come to my office."

Mallard looked curious. "What is it? Anything—"

The Sheriff's grin was reassuring. "This doggone Red Cross play is going to have us all jumping until it comes off, I guess. Bet your daughter looks good in it. Can't tell what will happen one of these days with a good-looking girl like that. She might be on the stage in one of these little local plays and some movie scout might see her, and next thing you know, she'd be in Hollywood."

"I don't want Rose Marie in Hollywood," George Mallard said positively.

"I know," the Sheriff grinned, "but you just can't tell."

He turned the car around and was fifty yards from the house when a car speeding along the paved road slowed so rapidly that the tires screamed a protest and turned into the driveway.

"Reckon this here is Rosemary now," Bill Eldon said, "and she's got Betty with her."

Lew Turlock heaved a sigh of relief.

The Sheriff drove slowly, found a place on the side of the dirt road where he could park, and blinked his lights to signal the oncoming car.

"Maybe you'd better do the first part of the talking," Eldon said to Turlock.

Lew Turlock nodded. He got out of the car, crossed in front of the headlights, and was waiting by the side of the road when Rose Marie drew abreast.

Illumination from the instrument light in the dashboard showed that a beautiful blonde girl with deep blue eyes and smooth, fine-textured skin was at the wheel, alone in the car.

Lew Turlock stepped forward. "Hello," he said somewhat inanely, his eyes going past Rose Marie to the empty seat beside her.

"Oh," she said. "It's . . . Mr. Turlock . . . How do you do, Mr. Turlock. Oh, I'm sorry. I hope you didn't come out here just to—"

"Where is Betty?" Turlock asked.

She shifted her position behind the steering wheel. She frowned for a moment, then smiled, and said, "Oh, she'll be along. She's right behind me."

The Sheriff slid out from behind the steering wheel. "Hello, Rose Marie," he said. "Just where is Betty?"

Rose Marie Mallard looked from one man to the other. The deep-blue eyes showed sudden panic. The pathetic attempt at a smile was wiped off her face.

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"Where is she?" the Sheriff asked, and then added, "Right now. I want to see her."

Rose Marie's words were hardly audible above the purr of the idling motor.

"I don't know," she said. "I've been trying to find her."

The Sheriff's voice hardened. "Now let's be frank," he said. "Suppose you tell me all you know about Betty Turlock."

"I don't know a thing. She was to be here . . . a little later."

"And spend the night with you?"

"Yes."

"What time was she supposed to be here?"

"She . . . well, later."

"How much later?"

"I don't know. I don't know as *she* did."

The Sheriff said, "There's been an accident over at Calhoun's. We're looking for Betty, and other people are going to be looking for Betty maybe. It's going to be kind of too bad if no one seems to know right where she is. Particularly because Betty's mother's going to say she's over here working on that Red Cross play."

"An accident, Sheriff?"

"Lorraine Calhoun's been killed."

"*Lorraine!* Oh, but Betty *couldn't* have done anything like that!"

"Like what?"

"Why, killing . . . You said it was an accident?"

"A horse kicked her, yes."

Rose Marie's exclamation was an "Oh!" which indicated great relief.

"Now after you got that telephone call from Lew here," the Sheriff said, "you jumped in your car and went out to try and find Betty, didn't you?"

There was a moment's hesitancy, then a reluctant nod.

"Now then," the Sheriff said, "let's not get into any *more* trouble, Rose Marie. Where did you go?"

"Out—out along the river road."

"You were looking for her parked in an automobile?"

"Yes."

"Whose automobile?"

"Hers—that is, Mr. Turlock's."

"And who did you expect would be with her?"

"Why . . . I was just looking for *her*."

There was a note of impatience in the Sheriff's voice. "You tell us the facts," he said, "and let us do the thinking. We're all friends of Betty's and we don't any one of us want to see a lot of talk get started. Now, you don't need to try to cover up things from us. You tell us the truth, only tell it to us fast."

She said, "She was to meet Frank Garwin tonight."

"Who's Garwin?" the Sheriff asked.

It was Lew Turlock who answered the question. "Friend of the Calhouns," he said.

The Sheriff studied Lew Turlock's face for a moment, then turned back to Rose Marie Mallard. "You tell us," he said.

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Her voice was thin with fright, but she said readily enough, "When the Calhouns bought the place and moved in, Lorraine was spending the summer up in Maine with friends. She only got back here about three weeks ago. Frank Garwin is a friend of—well, a friend of the family. He . . . they all sort of like him and . . . He wanted to be a lawyer and he and Lorraine were going together steady and then—well, he didn't have the money for an education and Lorraine loaned him enough to get himself through college and . . ."

"How about the army? Was he . . ."

"No, he has a bad heart. He stayed on and studied and—well, he got to seeing something of Betty . . . It's a mix-up. I don't know too much about it. All I know is they're miserable."

"Who's miserable?"

"Both of them."

"Lorraine?"

Rose Marie lashed out bitterly at that name. "Not Lorraine," she said. "She was playing around in Maine and that's why she didn't want to come back to California when her folks bought this place. If you ask me, I think she came back to give Frank Garwin the gate. And then she saw how things were and she just decided to play dog in the manger. Not that she cares a thing in the world about Frank, but it's her own pride, her own selfishness, her own conceit. She couldn't stand the idea of having some other girl take a boy friend away from her, the great Lorraine Calhoun—sophisticated, polished, traveled, patronizing, snobbish little—"

"She's dead," the Sheriff reminded her.

"I'm sorry. I forgot. I—well, I'm sorry."

Suddenly a light blazed into brilliance ahead.

"That's Mr. Thornton," Rose Marie said desperately. "He does that whenever someone wants us on the phone. That's probably Betty now."

They waited while she turned her car and then followed her to Thornton's house. But it wasn't Betty Turlock on the phone. It was long distance again, Irma Jessup calling. It seemed she had once more called Turlock's residence and Mrs. Turlock, innocently enough, had told the operator Betty could be reached through the Thornton residence.

Sheriff Eldon stepped to the telephone. "Hello," he said.

The woman's voice at the other end of the line said impatiently, "I didn't want to talk with you again, I wanted—"

"Now listen to me a minute," Eldon said. "This is the Sheriff talking. There's been an accident over at the Calhoun place and—"

He ceased talking as he heard the receiver at the other end of the line dropped on the hook. The line went abruptly dead.

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Bill Eldon sat in the Sheriff's office in the courthouse, a reading light flooding the battered desk where he had spread out the diary of Lorraine Calhoun.

The door opened and George Quinlan came breezing in.

"You get those pictures?" the Sheriff asked.

"Pictures of the whole business," Quinlan said. "We've turned the body over to the doctor. I got C. C. Calhoun himself on the phone. He should be here any time now. He's all broken up. He didn't know his daughter was here. She'd gone out for the evening."

Steps ascending the uncarpeted wooden stairs of the courthouse sounded abnormally loud against the background of night-time silence.

"This may be Calhoun now," Quinlan said.

"Sounds like there are two of them," the Sheriff said.

The door was pushed open, and a tall distinguished man strode into the room. "My name's Calhoun," he said. "I want to see the Sheriff."

Calhoun's wavy hair was touched with gray. His regular features, carefully groomed appearance, and well-modulated voice gave him an air of quiet authority. He was wearing a pearl-gray double-breasted suit with a light topcoat of about the same color.

Bill Eldon got up from behind his desk and held out his hand. "I'm Eldon, the Sheriff," he said. "Mighty sorry to have to meet you under circumstances like this, Mr. Calhoun."

Calhoun surveyed him with large dark eyes and shook hands. Then he stood slightly to one side and indicated another man standing just behind him in the doorway.

"Mr. Parnell," he said, "one of my business associates. He's going to take charge of—of details."

Parnell, square-jawed and coldly direct of eye, was a few years younger than Calhoun. He had put on weight which the careful tailoring of an expensive double-breasted suit could soften, but not entirely hide.

Once more the Sheriff shook hands and introduced Quinlan, the Deputy Sheriff. The four men sat down.

"Suppose you tell us about it," Calhoun said, after a few preliminaries.

The Sheriff briefly outlined what had happened.

Calhoun shook his head. "I simply can't believe it."

The Sheriff's voice showed his sympathy. "Her trip down here seems to have been sorta unexpected."

"It must have been. We were all intending to come tomorrow. But then Lorraine had her own car and was free to do as she pleased."

"Twenty-one?" the Sheriff asked.

"Going on twenty-two."

The Sheriff said, "Just as a matter of routine, I'm going to have to ask you to go down and identify the

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body and . . . well, you know how it is. There's a lot of formality to be gone through."

Parnell broke into the thread of the conversation. "That's why I'm along. Times like this, things are pretty tough on a father. I'm prepared to make whatever arrangements are necessary."

Parnell had a rapid-fire diction, frequently accompanied by swift explanatory gestures. He was exactly the type of man to take charge of details for a bereaved friend and make a good job of it.

"Would you like to go see your daughter now?" the Sheriff asked Calhoun.

"Naturally," Calhoun said shortly and started putting on his gloves.

"Let's get started and get it over with," Parnell said brusquely. "It's a disagreeable duty, but after that's over with, Mr. Calhoun can rest."

"Has the mare been shot?" Calhoun asked.

"Why, no," the Sheriff said in some surprise.

"Don't you shoot vicious animals?"

"Well, now . . ." The Sheriff hesitated and then went on, "Of course, being as how you were coming down here right away, I wanted to wait and get an authorization from you. After all, the mare—"

"You have my authorization," Calhoun said. "I never want to see that mare again. Shoot her at once, please."

"Well, now, we'd better wait until morning because—"

"I want her shot *tonight*," Calhoun said with cold, implacable hatred behind each word.

The Sheriff nodded to Quinlan. "Guess you can keep the office for a while, George. We'll go on down and go through the necessary formalities."

Calhoun remained wordless during the trip to the undertaking parlor. And when Bill Eldon introduced him to Logan, the Coroner and town mortician, he merely bowed. Then Carl Carver Calhoun, his face drawn into hard lines of sorrow, bent over the still figure lying on the marble slab.

Suddenly he straightened and turned.

"What's the idea?" he asked coldly. "Where's the other one?"

"The other what?"

"The other body—that of my daughter."

He read his answer in the expression of consternation on the faces of those about him.

"You mean to say *this* is the body you found in my barn?" he asked.

"Isn't that your daughter?" Logan asked.

"Definitely not."

"Do you know who it is?" Bill Eldon asked.

"I not only don't know who it is, but I certainly don't appreciate having been advised that my daughter was dead. I can't, of course, expect urban efficiency here in a rural

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community, but after all . . ." Calhoun controlled himself with an effort, moved his shoulders in an expressive gesture, and turned to his friend, Parnell. "Let's get out of here," he said.

"Just a moment," the Sheriff intervened. "Let's get this thing straight. You're *sure* this isn't your daughter?"

"I guess I should know my own daughter, Sheriff."

The Sheriff turned to Parnell in silent question.

Parnell shook his head. "That's definitely not Lorraine, if that's what you want to know, Sheriff."

"And neither one of you knows who she is?"

"I've never seen her before," Calhoun said.

"Nor I," Parnell added.

The Sheriff moved closer to look down at the body of the young woman.

"How did you happen to make such a ghastly mistake?" Calhoun asked.

"Well, of course," the Sheriff explained, "the way the lights were there in the stable, the face was pretty much in shadow and she was lying more or less face down. And that kick in her forehead and the blood hadn't helped any; but Sid Rowan identified her as Lorraine Calhoun and so did Lew Turlock."

Logan added hastily, "Of course, when you come right down to it, Bill, Lew Turlock just took a quick look and saw there was a body and ran to notify you on the phone. He never did get a really good look at the face. You remember he thought at first it was his daughter, Betty. And then when Sid Rowan came in, I noticed particularly that he just—well, he wanted to keep away from the place. He really didn't take a *good* look. He just went over and gave a quick glance and said it was Lorraine. I s'pose it was the fact that Miss Calhoun's car was parked out in front of the stable that did it."

The Sheriff said almost musingly, "That sort of ties in all along the line. *Two* people must have gone into that barn. This young woman and someone else."

"Meaning my daughter Lorraine?" Calhoun asked.

"Not meaning anyone yet," the Sheriff said. "Just a person. You see, Mr. Calhoun, the lights weren't on in the barn, so whoever entered must have turned them on."

"Go ahead. Let's hear the rest of it," Calhoun said.

"And another thing," the Sheriff went on. "In the manger of the mare's stall we found your daughter's diary with her name in the front of it. And I guess that sort of helped people to believe that the girl was your daughter. You see, things were pretty messy there in the stable—well, I can understand how the mistake happened to be made."

"I can't, Calhoun said shortly.

"And," the Sheriff continued,

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"when Lew Turlock found the body, there weren't any lights on in the barn. The horses had been stamping around for a while and Turlock had looked out of his window a couple of times in the half hour before he went over to investigate."

"I don't see what you're getting at," Calhoun said.

"It isn't hardly reasonable to suppose that this woman was wandering around there in the stable in the dark," the Sheriff said. "She must have turned on the lights when she went in. And she certainly didn't turn them off—after this happened. So I sort of figure someone must have been with her and . . ."

Calhoun interrupted, "Are you trying to insinuate that Lorraine took this girl into the stable and then after an accident of this sort calmly turned around, walked out, turned the lights off, not notified the authorities, not called the doctor, not . . . Bah!"

"Now just take it easy," the Sheriff said. "I'm talking about *somebody*. I haven't mentioned your daughter's name a'tall. I'm just talking about somebody that went in the stable with this woman."

"Well, your meaning is plain enough," Calhoun said. "Now let's get this straight, Sheriff. I'm relatively a newcomer in this county but I'm certainly not going to be pushed around. I don't like your insinuations. The body of this young woman happens to have been found in my stable. I suppose in view of that fact and my prominence in the city, there will be some newspaper comment about this. But let me warn you of one thing. In the event your bungling methods tend to add to that publicity, or make it sensational, or in the event the name of any one of my family is dragged into this thing, you will regret it as long as you live! As a matter of fact, I presume I have an action against you right now if I care to press it. Your slipshod methods have caused me to believe my daughter was dead. I left an important meeting and drove here at breakneck speed only to find myself the victim of a bucolic inefficiency which would have been ludicrous if it weren't so tragic. I advise you to think that over. Good night, sir."

Calhoun nodded to Parnell. The two men started from the undertaking parlor.

After a few steps, however, Parnell turned back. "Let's not have any misunderstanding, boys," he pleaded. "I've known Carl Calhoun for only a relatively short time, but it's been my privilege to know him well. Put yourself in his place. A young woman blunders into his stable and gets kicked by a horse. So far you've bungled things pretty much. From here on, let's get it right. The city newspapers will just give this only a couple of paragraphs if you boys use your heads. If you fellows keep messing

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it up, you'll stir up trouble. Once some newspaper gets the idea there's any mystery about it, or that Lorraine Calhoun was mixed up in it—well, you can see what will happen then. You can't push Calhoun around and he's nuts about his daughter—so take it easy."

"Where's Lorraine now?" the Sheriff asked.

Parnell's face lost its conciliatory smile and showed irritation. "How the hell should *I* know? Be your age—or perhaps you'd better try not to be. Damn it all, Sheriff, Lorraine Calhoun would no more have left an injured girl in case there'd been an accident . . ."

Parnell started to say something else, but changed his mind. Turning away, he hurried after Calhoun.

Logan and the Sheriff exchanged glances.

"Well," Logan said, as the steps down the hallway receded, "it looks as though we got a bear by the tail, Bill."

The Sheriff nodded.

"Of course, he's got us there on that identification business," Logan went on. "When you come right down to it, I'm the one that's responsible for that. You found that diary and there was something in it about Betty Turlock, so then you and Lew went chasing off to find her. I'm the one that's supposed to make the identification, I guess; but what with Lew Turlock and Sid Rowan and her car sitting out in front—well, it's a mistake anybody could have made."

"How about Sid's wife? Didn't she take a look?" the Sheriff asked.

"No, she didn't. After you left, Bill, I kept thinking about George Quinlan coming down and taking pictures, so naturally I was anxious to keep things just the way they were. I kept everyone away from the body. But Mrs. Rowan didn't seem to *want* to go near the body. I remember noticing it at the time because she's rather a nosey busybody and likes to know everything that's going on. They say she's quite a gossip."

Bill Eldon nodded, then stepped over and looked down at the silent body on the slab.

"Dirty shame a girl like this has to die," he said. "She evidently was mighty good-looking, had everything to live for. Nice trim-looking girl. Just a *nice*-looking girl. Good figure. We've got to find out who she is, how she happened to be in that stable, and who went in there with her."

"You still think someone went in with her, Bill?"

The Sheriff didn't answer for a moment. He was looking at the U-shaped mark left by the horseshoe, almost in the center of the girl's forehead.

"See anything strange about that, Jim?" he asked.

"About what?"

"About that horseshoe mark."

Logan shook his head.

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"That's awful high for a mare to kick," the Sheriff said. "And notice that most of the force seems to have been at the upper part of the shoe. Now a horse would have to kick awful high to get a girl on the forehead if she was standing up. And then the force would be on the lower part of the shoe."

"By George, you've got something there!" Logan exclaimed. "That means the girl must have been down on her hands and knees when she was kicked."

"And another thing," the Sheriff said. "You got a tape measure handy, Jim?"

"I can get one."

"Get it," the Sheriff said.

Logan started down the long passageway toward the front of the building, but after he had taken half a dozen steps, he suddenly turned and came back to the Sheriff.

"Bill," he said, "let's be careful what we do. We're already in a mess. Rush Medford, the District Attorney, doesn't like you. And more than that, he's always catering to people who have money and influence. He's got his eye on a political plum, maybe getting an appointment to one of the upper courts. A man like Calhoun can twist him around his finger."

Bill Eldon, looking down at the dead girl, said nothing. His eyes were half closed in thoughtful concentration.

"Bill Eldon," Logan said irritably, "you listen to me! You ain't as young as you used to be and there's been a lot of talk around about cleaning out the courthouse ring, beginning with you. And you watch Rush Medford. He's a back-stabber if I ever saw one. Back of all that smooth palaver of his, he's just laying for a chance to throw the hooks into you. Now, we've kind of led with our chins on this one and, the way I see it, the only thing to do is to back up and back up fast. We'll lose a little skin off our noses doing it, but it's better to do that than to lose our heads."

The Sheriff abruptly turned away from the corpse. "Jim," he said, "I don't ever aim to back up from anything that I think is right. Let's go get that tape measure."

He walked with Logan to the front office where the Coroner opened a desk drawer, handed the Sheriff a small steel tape graduated to sixteenths of an inch. "This all right?" he asked.

The Sheriff looked at the tape, nodded, and turned back toward the room in the rear of the establishment.

"Now you look here, Bill," Logan persisted. "Calhoun's on the warpath. Calhoun's got influence. And you just can't go bargin' around—"

The Sheriff walked away while Logan was talking. It wasn't, Logan realized, any intentional discourtesy —merely that the Sheriff had his mind completely centered on something else.

Logan started to follow him, then

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changed his mind, walked back to the desk, and sat down.

Logan himself held an elective office. Being Coroner made all the difference between carrying on his undertaking business at a good profit and just being able to eke out a living.

Logan knew what was going to happen in this case. If Bill Eldon didn't back up and back up fast, Calhoun would be after the Sheriff's scalp—might be anyway. Edward Lyons, publisher of the *Rockville Gazette*, had turned against Bill Eldon within the last two years. The first time Lyons had tried to throw the weight of his paper against the Sheriff, Bill Eldon had outfoxed him and neatly turned the tables. Since that time Lyons had been lying low, waiting for his political wounds to heal. But no one who knew Lyons thought for a moment he was finished. He was merely biding his time.

If Jim Logan stayed with the Sheriff on this thing, it would be a question of sink or swim. The time for Logan to bail out was right now. That was the sensible thing to do. All he had to do was to pick up the telephone and call Ed Lyons at the *Rockville Gazette*.

Logan heard the sound of the Sheriff's steps in the corridor. The Sheriff tossed the steel tape measure on Logan's desk.

"That mark of the horseshoe is four and fifteen-sixteenths inches at the widest part, Jim. I want you to verify that yourself, I'm goin' out."

"Where?"

"Lookin' for a couple who might be doing a little necking. Any suggestions where they might be?"

"The river road," Logan said, his manner preoccupied.

"They ain't there."

"Only other place I know of is the ball park. They go there sometimes."

"Thanks," Eldon said. "I'll try the ball park. Night, Logan."

"Good night, Bill," the Coroner said without looking up.

The Sheriff left him sitting there at the desk, his eyes on the telephone, indecision in his manner.

The wide gate to the auto entrance of the ball park was propped open and the Sheriff drove in to what seemed a deserted enclosure. But as he swung his car in a wide searching circle, so that the headlights illuminated all parts of the field, he suddenly flushed quarry; an automobile which had been standing in dark silence by the bleachers blazed into brilliance and started for the exit.

The Sheriff moved to head it off. The other car gathered speed. The Sheriff switched on his red spot light.

The car, bathed in blood-red brilliance, took to headlong flight. It tore past the gate posts, screamed into a turn, and started on the road toward town.

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The Sheriff gave it the siren.

The other car kept on. The Sheriff poured gas into the motor of the County car and really settled down to dangerous driving. If the car ahead wanted to play rough, Bill Eldon was willing to do his part.

But the driver of the car ahead was only fairly good at that sort of thing, and it took less than half the distance to town for the Sheriff to work alongside and crowd the other car over to the ditch.

"What's the matter?" the Sheriff asked, rolling down the window of his car. "Can't you folks hear the siren?"

Betty Turlock at the wheel was white-faced with apprehension. She tried to say something but her quivering lips failed.

The Sheriff raised his five-cell flashlight. The searching beam stabbed into the interior of the car. He saw that the back seat was empty and then let the light dwell searchingly on the features of the young man who sat at Betty Turlock's side.

The Sheriff shut off the motor of his car, opened the door, and got out. "You shouldn't have done that, Betty."

"I—I thought the officers were making a roundup of petting parties. I didn't want to be caught."

The Sheriff pushed his hat back on his head. "You know, Betty, this is a small community and things have a way of getting around. You're supposed to be with Rose Marie Mallard working on that Red Cross business. And if I was you, I'd get out there just as fast as I could. I'll take this young man with me. What's his name?"

"Frank Garwin," the man said.

"Oh, yes, pleased to meet you, Frank. You don't live here, do you?"

"No."

"Come down once in a while to visit the Calhouns, don't you?"

"That's right."

"Friend of Lorraine?"

"Yes."

"Know a girl named Irma Jessup?"

"Yes."

"Who is she?"

"A friend of Lorraine's."

"And of yours?"

"Yes, I've known her for a long time."

"You know her, Betty?"

"I've never met her. But I've heard Frank speak of her."

"She's been trying to get you long-distance telephone. Seems like there's been an accident out at Calhoun's. A horse kicked a young woman."

"Good heavens!" Betty Turlock said.

Garwin said nothing, but the Sheriff noticed he moved his head over toward the open window on Betty's side of the car, and as he did so, his hand rested for a moment on Betty's.

"Was she hurt badly?" Betty asked.

"Killed," the Sheriff said. "We're sort of looking around. Your dad's

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been looking for you and you'd better get out to Mallard's right away. You can come with me, Frank."

Garwin came around to the Sheriff's car and climbed in beside him.

"Get going," the Sheriff said to Betty Turlock.

She sent the Turlock car lurching forward in a way that would have been a shock to Lew Turlock if he could have seen the tire-spinning take-off.

Turning to Frank Garwin, the Sheriff said, "Just sit in here a minute, son. I want to ask you a couple of questions."

"Yes, sir."

"You been out there with Betty long?"

"Not very long."

"Live in the city?"

"Yes."

"You don't have a car?"

"No."

"How'd you come to town"?

"On the seven o'clock bus."

"And had a date with Betty?"

"That's right."

"She picked you up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"Out at the high school."

"How'd you get from the bus station to the high school?"

"I walked."

"Betty's been gone from her house some little time."

Garwin said, "I—I was late."

"What made you late, Frank?"

He merely shook his head.

The Sheriff's voice was kindly. "When this accident happened out at Calhoun's, I naturally looked around a bit. In the manger I found what seems to be Lorraine Calhoun's diary. Because it's evidence, I've been reading it here and there, sort of hitting the high spots. I guess you're the Frank she mentions in there, aren't you?"

"I suppose so. What did she say about me?"

"I'm asking the questions right now," the Sheriff said, his voice kindly but authoritative. "Now, Lorraine seemed to think you belonged to her and that Betty had been doing a little cutting in."

Garwin hesitated.

"Better start talkin'," the Sheriff said.

The authority in the Sheriff's voice brought forth a sudden rush of words.

"I suppose I'm a first-class heel. My folks were cleaned out in the depression. Both of them died within three years of the failure of the bank in which they had their life savings. I'd been a basketball player in prep school and I overdid things. I have an athlete's heart. They say I can probably get over it if I take care of myself. But I can't do any heavy work for a while. I wanted to go to college. I had always wanted to fit myself for a career, and the way things were, it just seemed impossible.

"Lorraine and I were—well, I guess we were in love. I thought I

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was, anyway. She offered to finance me through college out of her allowance. I took her up on it. And then afterwards—well, I met Betty and . . . gosh, I felt like a heel. I couldn't turn around and give Lorraine a double-cross and—well, I tried to let her see that perhaps we'd changed. But she just couldn't see things that way."

"So you started seein' Betty on the sly?" the Sheriff asked.

"Certainly not," Garwin flared up. "I told Betty that—well, as soon as I realized how things were drifting, I told her I couldn't see her any more."

"And so you took the bus and came down here for her to meet you?"

"That was her idea. She said that she just couldn't give me up without seeing me once more and talking things over. She—well, it's hard for her to understand."

"Yes, I can see how she might feel," the Sheriff said. "Now, you haven't told me what made you late."

"I was to meet her at the high school. It was the last time I was ever to see her alone. I felt that if Lorraine wanted me to go ahead with it—and announce our engagement—well, that was the way it had to be. And I wasn't even going to come down any more on week-ends. I couldn't bear to be visiting next door to Betty and see her just as a casual acquaintance. It meant too much to me.

"Well, I got off the bus and went to the high school grounds. Betty drove up shortly afterwards. And then I just couldn't face it. I felt certain that if I saw Betty and held her in my arms once more, I couldn't ever give her up. On the other hand, I couldn't go to Lorraine and tell her that we were finished—not after the things she'd done for me. You don't understand how these things look to Lorraine. She thinks that Betty deliberately cut in and that I'd been heel enough to . . . Oh, I just can't tell you the whole mess, Sheriff. It's all mixed up and—"

"I know, son," the Sheriff said sympathetically. "So you waited there in the high school grounds and decided you were going to wait right there out of sight until Betty drove away?"

"That's right."

"And then what happened?"

"Then I—well, I heard her crying when she thought I wasn't going to meet her and . . . gosh, I just seemed to have got everything all balled up. I have a knack for doing everything wrong. I couldn't let her think I'd stood her up on that last meeting."

"As you get older," the Sheriff said, "you'll find the best way to play things is straight from the shoulder. Now let's get this all straight. How long were you there?"

"I can't tell you exactly how long it was before I spoke to her. I got in on the seven o'clock bus. I was

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at the high school by seven fifteen. Betty drove up about ten minutes later. I stood there in the shadows, watching her. She shut off her lights and the motor and waited. After ten or fifteen minutes, she got the idea I wasn't going to show up. I was standing so close to her I could hear her sobbing. After a while I couldn't stand it so I joined her."

The Sheriff switched on the ignition and started his car. "We've got Betty's reputation to consider," he said. "I'll drive you over to San Rodolpho, son, and you can pick up a bus there that will take you back to the city without anyone knowing you were here. We'll all pretend she was with Rose Marie all the time. If you've fallen out of love with Lorraine, you won't be doing her any favor to marry her while you're loving someone else. However, you work out your own problem. "You'll like it better that way."

When the Sheriff returned to his office in the courthouse, he found George Quinlan talking to an exceedingly difficult young woman who quite evidently had backed the Deputy Sheriff into a corner.

Quinlan's face lit up with relief. "Here's the Sheriff now," he said.

She turned to Bill Eldon—a chestnut-haired girl who had the sculptured appearance which comes only to women who have both the time and the egotism to cultivate it.

The Sheriff noticed a strong superficial resemblance to the dead girl. Nor did he need Quinlan's introduction to realize the identity of his caller.

"Miss Lorraine Calhoun," Quinlan said, and his manner indicated that he was retiring from the field of battle just as definitely as though he had added, "And you can count me out from here on."

The young woman was nervously lighting one cigarette from the stub of another.

"Will you *kindly* explain to me what this is all about?" Lorraine asked the Sheriff.

"Well, now, ma'am," the Sheriff said, "you might just as well sit down. We've got some talking to do. The way it looks to me, *you're* going to be the one that explains to *me* what it's all about."

There was no antagonism in the Sheriff's voice, merely a quiet, calm persistence. Lorraine was shrewd enough to note the dogged power back of that good-natured drawl. Abruptly she changed her tactics.

Her smile was meant as a dazzling reward for a man who would come to heel without too much difficulty.

"My diary is private. I want it back."

"So I gather," the Sheriff said. "When did you have it last, Miss Calhoun?"

"That's none of your business."

The Sheriff said, "If someone stole that diary, it's my duty to recover it. If you left it in the manger there in the barn, then naturally the Coroner will want to

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know whether the dead girl was there when you left it and what time it was."

She thought that over while she regarded him with thoughtful eyes. Once more she changed her tactics. "I'm glad you've explained it to me. I can see now that you're absolutely right."

"That's fine. Now when was the last time you had this particular diary?" the Sheriff asked.

"Around six o'clock, shortly before I left the city."

"And what did you do?"

She said, "I made an entry in the diary. Then I put it in the glove compartment of my automobile."

"And locked it up?"

"I don't know. The glove compartment was *un*locked when I returned to my car."

"I notice there's one page torn out of your diary—the date of April 17th."

Her eyes and voice showed surprise. "A page missing!"

"Yes, torn out."

"I can't believe it!"

"Where were you on April 17th?"

"Let's see. I was—yes, I was in Kansas City visiting a friend, stopping over on my way to New York."

"Now you drove down from the city, drove directly to your house, and parked your car in front of the stables?"

"Yes."

"And the stable was dark?"

"That's right."

"The horses had been fed?"

"I don't know."

"But Sid Rowan wasn't there?"

"No. There was no one home. I was upset and I—I took a long walk."

"Where to?"

"Heavens, I don't know. I just walked for miles along the country road."

"Your diary indicates that you might be a little jealous of Betty Turlock."

She threw back her head and laughed throatily. "Jealous of little Betty Turlock? Don't be silly!"

"But your diary mentions a man who is evidently a friend of yours and then mentions Betty—"

"If you *have* to inquire into my private affairs," she said, "Frank is a very close and very dear friend of mine. Betty Turlock was out to get him the minute she met him. I know farmers' daughters are supposed to be fascinating, but I didn't want to see Frank throwing himself away on that sort of girl. *I* wouldn't marry Frank if he were the last man on earth, but he's a friend. There's also a matter of some thirty-five hundred dollars that I have invested in Frank Garwin's career. I put up that money for him to get an education. I paid it out of my allowance. Naturally, I want to see him succeed. He can't do it with a girl like Betty Turlock draped around his neck."

The confused pound of hurried steps sounded on the stairs from

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the lower floor of the courthouse.

The Sheriff turned toward the door.

Rush Medford, the District Attorney, pushed open the door. Behind him, Calhoun, Parnell, and another man who was a stranger to the Sheriff grouped themselves into a supporting semicircle.

"Sheriff," Medford said, "what's this I hear about you holding a diary of Miss Calhoun's?"

"That's right," the Sheriff said.

"Give it back to her," Medford commanded.

"It may be evidence," the Sheriff said.

"Evidence of what?"

"Well, that's what I'm investigating."

Medford raised his voice angrily. "As District Attorney, it's my duty to advise you as to the course of conduct you should follow. I now advise you to give that diary back."

One of the men behind the District Attorney moved impressively forward. He was, the Sheriff noticed, a well-fed, prosperous man in the forties. The knifelike crease of his trousers, the expensive and unwrinkled appearance of his coat shed an aura of affluence which harmonized with the measured, judicial tones of the man's voice.

"Permit me, Sheriff," he said. "I am Oscar Delano, of the firm of Delano, Swift, Madison and Charles. We handle Mr. Calhoun's legal work. I don't want to seem abrupt, but unless we get that diary back, I am instructed by my client to start suit against you at once for the damages caused to my client by your negligence in falsely announcing to him that his daughter had been killed."

The Sheriff walked across the office, slammed the door of his safe shut, and spun the dial of the combination.

"Start suit," he said.

"You fool!" Medford exclaimed.

The Sheriff settled back in his creaky swivel chair.

"You haven't got a leg to stand on," the city lawyer said.

"Well, now," the Sheriff drawled, "maybe I haven't. But when you can explain how a mare, wearing a number-ought shoe which measures four and three-sixteenths inches at the widest part can kick a person in the head and leave a mark four and fifteen-sixteenths inches wide, which means a number-two shoe—well, then I'll give you the diary."

"What do you mean?" Calhoun asked.

The Sheriff said, "However that girl was killed, that mare didn't do it. I say it was murder. Now then, go start your lawsuit."

(*continued on page 109*)

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first publication in the United States

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **VICTOR CANNING**

TITLE: ***To Whoever Finds This***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Monsieur Hébert

LOCALE: Near Nice, France

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Inspector Hébert of the Sûreté was taking his first vacation in two years. He only wanted to rest and enjoy the sun. But it is impossible for a detective to avoid mixing pleasure with business . . .*

MONSIEUR HEBERT'S HOLIDAYS were very much at the mercy of his profession. He was a Detective-Inspector in the French Sûreté, and this was his first holiday in two years. He felt that he had more than earned it, and he was determined to enjoy it in his own quiet bachelor fashion.

But there was a strong streak of pessimism in Monsieur Hébert. A man of his profession, he knew, could never be entirely on holiday because it was impossible for him to subdue his instincts, to forget his training. However, he was doing his best.

The hotel on the Mediterranean coast near Nice was small, the food was excellent, and the other guests kept to themselves—and this he appreciated for, although he was a companionable and kindly man, he saw too much of people generally —too much of the wrong kind of people.

He got up from the breakfast table and wandered down the stone steps below the umbrella pines to the small beach, his newspaper un-

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der his arm. The beach was deserted. Most of the guests preferred the larger beach around the corner where there was more life, more activity. This smaller beach was for people of a tranquil turn of mind who just wished to sit and enjoy the sun and their own thoughts.

Monsieur Hébert settled himself against a rock, tipped his Panama forward over his broad forehead, and spread the newspaper on his knees—a middle-aged man, relaxing, content to do nothing, knowing that the moment he returned to Paris there would be too much to do.

After he had been there about half an hour he heard the sound of footsteps at the top of the beach. He looked up and saw one of the other guests coming onto the beach. It was a man of about thirty, fair-haired, with a sharpish yet good-looking face. A little weak about the lips, Monsieur Hébert thought.

The man wore a white drill suit and carried a beach towel and a small writing pad. He sat down about ten yards from Monsieur Hébert and without a glance at him, opened his pad, stared out to sea for a while, and then began to write.

Monsieur Hébert watched him over the top of his newspaper. It was a habit he could not help: he just had to watch people.

The man wrote for a few minutes, then he put the pad down and stood up. Slowly he began to undress, stripping to the bathing trunks which he was wearing under his clothes. He piled his clothes neatly on the sand, and when he had finished undressing, he tore the page on which he had been writing from the pad and placed the sheet of paper carefully on top of his clothes. To anchor it against the slight sea breeze, he put a stone on top of the paper.

Monsieur Hébert's mind went from third to second gear at this strange action. This man had been in the hotel when he had arrived three days before. He was quiet and reserved and did not mix with the other guests. What was his name? Monsieur Hébert shut his eyes and visualized the hotel register. Mendel? No, Joseph Mendin.

When he opened his eyes Monsieur Hébert saw that the man was wading into the sea. He went in slowly until the water reached his chest and then he began to swim lazily outward. He swam until he was lost in the fierce sun-glitter on the sea.

Monsieur Hébert's eyes came back to the pile of clothes. Why should a man undress and then so carefully put a sheet of paper on top of his clothes? It couldn't be a message to anyone coming down to the beach to join him—this man had no friends at the hotel.

Monsieur Hébert stared across at the paper and told himself that it was no business of his. But even as he decided this, his mind went into first gear and he groaned gently to

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himself. Being a policeman was not a happy lot.

He sat there for a few minutes trying to immerse himself in his newspaper, and then in the end he had to give way to his professional instincts. He rose and glanced out to sea. Joseph Mendin was just disappearing round a point of outjutting rock.

Monsieur Hébert walked to the pile of clothes and took the sheet of paper from the top. He stood there in the sun reading it—a few lines of neat handwriting.

To Whoever Finds This, it was headed. Then it went on: *I, Joseph Mendin of the Hotel Boudot, Paris, am perfectly sane and in possession of all my faculties, and I have decided to end my life.*

That was all. But it was enough for Monsieur Hébert. He looked out to sea. There was no sign of Joseph Mendin. For the moment this did not worry Monsieur Hébert. A good swimmer cannot really drown until he is too tired to stay afloat.

Monsieur Hébert bent down and went through the man's jacket. From the inside pocket he took out a wallet. There were a few odds and ends in it, but no money. Monsieur Hébert sighed. The usual motive for suicide. No money—or a woman.

He went down the beach to where the hotel rowboat was pulled up on the sand. He pushed it into the water and began to row out. A few minutes later he turned the rocky point and saw Joseph Mendin fifty yards away, lying on his back, floating.

Monsieur Hébert brought the boat up alongside and Joseph Mendin turned over with a splashing of arms and looked up at him.

"Get in," said Monsieur Hébert.

"No."

"Get in," repeated Monsieur Hébert, "or I'll pull you in. I'm a strong man."

Joseph Mendin looked at the detective angrily. "Leave me alone. I suppose you've read my note?"

"I have. Now, get in."

Joseph Mendin considered this for a while, then he grabbed the stern of the boat and hauled himself over.

"It won't do any good," he said as he sat down on the stern seat.

"You never know," said Monsieur Hébert. "It may be the best thing that ever happened to you."

"Nothing of any good could happen to me. I'm finished."

Monsieur Hébert pulled out his cigarettes and lit one. Joseph Mendin refused one.

"Now," said Monsieur Hébert, "let's have it. Why should you want to drown yourself. A woman?"

Joseph Mendin shook his head. "I'm not married. No, it's not a woman. It's money—just plain money. Where money is concerned I'm unlucky. I never seem to be able to keep a job. I've started various concerns, little affairs which

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would have prospered for any other man, but not for me. I'm up to my ears in debt. I'm broke. Two weeks ago I decided to leave Paris, come down here and spend the little I have left, then finish things off. I can't fight against it any longer. I haven't the will. I paid my hotel bill yesterday and today . . . Well, you see how it is."

"You mean there is no one you can turn to for help? Not a soul?"

"No. Except, well . . ."

"Well, what?"

"Well, not that it makes any difference, but I did have the promise of a good job in Perpignan in two months' time. But two months is a lifetime to me just now. And anyway, even if I could get the money to keep me going until then, the job would probably turn out like all the others, and I'd soon be back where I am now. But it is just a chance, I suppose. A man's luck has to change sometime."

"Would a thousand francs keep you going until then? Damn it all, you're too young to give up so easily."

"You mean you'd do that? Let me have a thousand francs?"

Monsieur Hébert looked steadily at Joseph Mendin. He was thinking how fine an edge some people walked in their lives. The division between good and bad was thin, so thin. And being a kindly man, not soured by his profession, he had not lost sight of his original belief that a cure was better than a conviction for people like Joseph Mendin.

"I'll give you a thousand francs," he said. "Though really, since I work for the Sûreté, I should turn you in for obtaining money under false pretenses. I don't know how long you've been working this racket, Joseph—I hope not long. I'm on holiday and I don't want to be bothered with it. You get a thousand francs from me on one condition—that you go straight from now on. I'm putting your name on every police file in the country and if you turn up on the wrong side of the law you'll get harsh treatment. It's a warning—take it to heart. Here—" He pulled out his wallet and handed some bank notes to the astonished Joseph Mendin.

"I don't understand. I—"

Monsieur Hébert shook his head. "Don't give me that innocent look. A nice racket. You find a quiet beach and an elderly buffer like myself all alone. You can do it week after week down here. You go through that suicide-note act right under the elderly buffer's nose and arouse his curiosity. Then he has to get up and read it, and in a few minutes he's rowing out after you.

"Oh, yes, you make sure there's a boat handy. Out he comes and back you come with a little bundle of cash—a sure thing nearly every time. And a good life while the summer lasts. What do you do in the winter? Never mind. But remember, from now on you'll be

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watched. Agreed?"

Joseph Mendin looked down at the banknotes in his hand.

"You're a good man," he said humbly. "How on earth did you know?"

"When you said you'd decided to come down from Paris and finish it all when your money was gone."

"But why should that have given me away?"

"Because I'm a detective. I didn't just read the suicide note. I went through your wallet. No money in it—that's true. But Joseph, my lad, no man who paid his hotel bill yesterday, knowing that he was going to commit suicide, would ever on the same day take a suit to the cleaners in Nice. The ticket from the cleaners is in your wallet. Leave a suit to be cleaned and pressed and picked up in a few days' when you meant to end it all? No, my lad. You had every intention of wearing that suit again."

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

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CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Atlee, Philip	THE DEATH BIRTH CONTRACT	Gold Medal (Orig.)	$ .50	1/27
Atlee, Philip	THE PAPER PISTOL CONTRACT	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	1/27
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a new story by

MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

TITLE: *Nameless Enemy*

TYPE: Crime and Detection

LOCALE: United States

TIME: 1935–1965

COMMENTS: *Wilson Blayn had everything to live for, every prospect for a happy and successful life—and then disaster struck . . . One of Miss deFord's most imaginative stories.*

THIS STORY BEGINS 30 YEARS before its ending. In 1935 Wilson Blayn was young, rich, and ambitious. He was a graduate *magna cum laude* of a great law school, and like most young men of his antecedents and connections he had started low in a blue-ribbon law firm, expecting and being expected to rise rapidly—always concerned with civil and corporation cases, never with practice in the criminal courts. He had married a girl from the right circles, he lived in the right kind of house in the right kind of suburb, unostentatiously and frugally as frugality is understood among the more Puritanical rich—and any prophet could have foretold his future.

When he died in 1965, Wilson Blayn—though he still had most of his inherited fortune, carefully invested in the safest bonds—was an embittered, lonely man, ostracized by the people among whom he had grown up, disregarded or avoided by such formal associates as he had left, wifeless, childless, homeless (he had holed up in a second-class residential hotel for the last years of his life), and with only one burning ambition left—to identify, expose, and destroy the man who had caused his downfall.

In 1935 Blayn's ambition had been not for vengeance, but for political achievement. His road was carefully mapped out—District At-

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torney, State Attorney General, Governor, perhaps even President. He belonged to the right party for his state and district, he had the money to conduct effective campaigns, he knew the people who mattered and who could help. He thought of himself much as a young Roman of good family might have thought in the days of the Republic: civic leadership was his natural duty and responsibility as well as his path to eminence. The state primary was in June; he was a candidate for the nomination of District Attorney by the party in power, and nomination was tantamount to election. He had every right to expect success; his only opponent was a long-time deputy who was getting beyond the useful age and was rumored to be too fond of the bottle.

A single night changed it all.

On the night of April 15, 1935, Wilson Blayn went to bed a very happy man. He had spent the afternoon with the County Central Committee, and everything had gone well. He had spent the evening in a private room in a hospital, where two days before his wife had given birth to their son.

He let himself in at about ten o'clock to an empty house, for the three servants and the housekeeper, a Mrs. Schoff, slept out; he and Mary preferred their privacy. But Mrs. Schoff had, as usual, left sandwiches for him on a plate in the dining room; he poured himself a nightcap to drink while he ate, and by eleven he was in bed. He fell asleep almost at once, remembering fondly Mary's smile as she bent over the baby, and the thrill of feeling the tiny hand curl around his finger.

He was awakened from deep slumber by a pounding on the front door and intermittent ringing of the doorbell. He looked sleepily at the bedside clock and saw that it was 2:45. He got himself into a dressing gown and slippers and stumbled downstairs, his eyes half shut and his hair ruffled.

He opened the door on the chain, and there on the step stood a woman —young and slender, from what he could see, and a complete stranger.

"Oh!" she gasped as the door opened, "Thank heaven I woke somebody at last!"

"What's the matter?" asked Blayn, his voice thick with sleep.

"My car's broken down, and I want to phone the Association."

Peering out, Blayn could see a car parked at the curb.

"Please just let me use your phone!" the woman pleaded. "I was afraid I'd have to sit in the car till daylight, and anything could happen."

Blayn shook his head to waken himself fully. A thousand thoughts darted through his mind. Was there a confederate hidden in the thick bushes of the front garden? If he let the woman in, would he be rushed, overpowered, burgled, perhaps shot if he resisted?

"Why pick on me?" he growled.

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"There are plenty of other houses on the block." He caught himself before he added that he was alone in the house.

The girl began to cry.

"Oh, *please*," she sobbed. "I only want to use your phone. I don't know what's wrong—I'm not out of gas, but the car stopped dead, right in front here, and I can't get it going. I was afraid to try anywhere else—these houses are so far apart and they all have grounds around them. The Association will send someone to tow me away, if I can just call them, and I can wait in the car if you'll turn a light on or keep an eye on me till they come."

Then Blayn thought of something else—the kind of people who "don't want to get involved," who like Pharisees pass by on the other side. He was not that kind of person. Perhaps, too, he remembered that if this girl was really in trouble and he turned her down, the story might injure his nomination. And it was true that it would be dangerous for her to sit even in a locked car, and even in this neighborhood, at three o'clock in the morning.

He made up his mind and unlatched the chain.

The woman stepped into the front hall. "The phone's right here," he started to say.

It all happened too fast to register clearly.

With one motion the girl threw off her long coat, and to his horror Blayn saw that under it she wore nothing whatever. She wound her arms around his neck, pushing his head upward, and pressed herself tightly against him. Instantly, in the darkness outside, a flashbulb went off twice. And then, before he could get his breath, she had darted down for her coat, run out of the house, and half a minute later the engine in the "stalled" car started and the car was speeding down the street.

Blayn ran to the open door, but all he could see was the vanishing tail-light. The photographer must have raced to the car with her, but Blayn caught only a half-glimpsed shadow of movement.

He did not go to bed again. He sat with a bottle of whiskey beside him, smoking many cigarettes, trying to figure things out.

It was a beautiful frameup. What could he do to counter it? And who had done it to him, and why?

The "why" seemed obvious enough. Somebody wanted to kill his nomination. As for the "who," all he could be sure of at the moment was that somebody knew he was alone in the house and vulnerable. But that was no secret—the papers had carried the news yesterday of the baby's birth. And anybody could find out without much effort that the servants left every evening after cleaning up from dinner and did not return until eight o'clock the following morning.

The Deputy District Attorney who was challenging him for the nomination? Not that old hack; he

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hadn't the astuteness for such a plot, nor the courage to take such a risk.

What other enemies had he? He searched his mind. None that he could think of in the party. None in the law office. None among his social acquaintances. None from his past, or from school. He had no family; he was an only child, and an orphan. Both his parents had been killed in an automobile accident before he was three years old, and he had been reared under the depersonalized guardianship of an officer of the bank which was acting as executor of his parents' estate.

He remembered neither of his parents; his unemotional childhood and youth had turned him into a self-sufficient, rather self-centered man, whose only weakness was an occasionally uncontrollable temper. He had never had a friend close enough to quarrel with, or felt really close to anybody.

Could his enemy, then, be someone who had wanted Mary, and was seeking revenge? It seemed unlikely. Mary had gone to school in France and had returned to America only a few months before he met her. From the beginning he had monopolized her, and she was not the sort to encourage a jealous rival. Theirs was a marriage of cool affection and suitability rather than of ardent love.

For a while he toyed with the idea that some lunatic envious of his good luck—his money, his health and youth and good looks, his contented marriage, even his infant son—was trying to ruin him; but he dismissed that with a shrug. This was obviously a cold, sane plot.

As for counteraction, there was nothing he could do until his antagonist made his next move. That would probably be soon enough.

It came the very next afternoon, in a sensational evening tabloid of the political opposition, which had a big surreptitious circulation even in this sedate suburb of a big city.

Does Brook County Want a Playboy As D.A.?

His startled grimace in the photograph could have passed for lechery. The hands with which by reflex he had pushed the woman from him seemed glued to her naked body. She was leaning a little backward, and even from a rear view she was voluptuously beautiful.

More so than poor Mary, who was a bit on the skinny side.

Driving to the hospital, the horrible paper crushed beside him, Blayn could only pray that he would have a chance to tell Mary the real story before somebody passed this one on to her. Phrases and innuendoes from the smirking newspaper account echoed sickeningly in his mind.

He was too late. Mary had heard the nurses giggling together and had insisted on knowing the joke. Her special nurse met him at the door of her room. "I'm so sorry, Mr. Blayn," she murmured, struggling

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to keep from smiling. "Mrs. Blayn isn't feeling so well today. She said to tell you she didn't feel up to seeing you right now."

He pushed by her angrily. Mary was lying on her back, her eyes closed, her face pale.

"Oh, my dear!" he cried. "I'm so sorry. I wanted to get here and tell you about this first."

What he had loved in Mary was her coolness, her calm. They had never pretended to be passionately in love, but to him at least it had been the perfect partnership he had wanted. Now she opened her eyes and her look was cold, not cool. She spoke, scarcely moving her lips, and her tone was harsh.

"To do this to me!" she said. "I wouldn't have minded so much if you had been discreet—but to disgrace me like this! I'm ashamed to look my family and my friends in the face. And my poor little baby!"

"My"—not "our."

His tenderness turned to boiling rage; he felt his face flush and the veins in his temples swell. He did not recognize his own voice.

"So that's how much you trust me, is it? You'd rather believe that filthy yellow rag than your own husband! They framed me, Mary. I thought you at least would stand by me."

Her eyes filled with tears and they ran down her cheeks. She made no effort to wipe them away. But her voice did not change.

"I've always suspected you didn't really care for me, not really," she said icily. "Now I understand a lot of things."

"That story's a dirty lie!" Blayn protested. "I'm going to sue that paper for enough to put it out of business. Somebody did this to me, and I'm going to find out who. Listen, Mary. Last night I was sound asleep when—"

"Please, Will. I can't—I'm feeling too ill to talk. Later—not now. Please go now, Will—please."

She turned her back on him. He wheeled abruptly and strode from the room. The nurse opened the door.

"You bitch!" he growled. Her scared face made him feel like laughing. He almost ran out of the hospital; he drove away savagely, twice just missed a collision, and reached his office full of helpless fury.

They all knew, down to the office boy; he could tell from their averted glances. On his desk he found a note from his secretary: "Mr. Mackintosh wants to see you as soon as you come in."

Old Phineas Mackintosh, the senior member of the firm. The old man was embarrassed.

"Of course I realize this is all nonsense, my boy," he mumbled. "But I think it would be wise if you'd take a short leave till you can clear it up and the talk dies down. I've felt right along you were devoting too much time to politics, anyway."

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That was untrue. Up to now Mackintosh had been encouraging him. Anger overcame Blayn again.

"That won't be necessary," he said roughly. "I'm tendering my resignation, as of now."

Against the old man's sputtering he slammed the door, dictated his resignation, stood over his secretary while she typed it, signed it, and ordered her to take it to Mackintosh. Then without another word he cleaned his desk of personal belongings and left the office.

He dared not trust himself to go in person to *The Daily Intelligencer.* He went home to draw up papers for a suit for defamation of character. The paper had been careful about direct libel.

Mrs. Schoff had left a note on the desk in his study: "My daughter is sick and I have to look after her. I don't know when I can be back. Please send check for wages due to my address."

He wrote the check at once and enclosed it in a note informing Mrs. Schoff that he was giving her a month's wages in lieu of notice. In the kitchen he found the two maids gossiping with the gardener; he paid them all off on the spot.

He packed a bag and took a room in a downtown hotel. There he sent for a public stenographer and dictated a letter to the County Central Committee withdrawing his candidacy.

Notice of his suit brought all the other news media down upon him. It did not help him much when he broke a persistent TV photographer's camera, and punched a tenacious reporter on the nose.

The suit was heard much sooner than he had ever been able to get other suits on the trial docket in behalf of the law firm. He acted as his own attorney. The defense attorney was a flamboyant lawyer, a master of publicity, whose clients were usually the accused in sensational murder cases.

The Daily Intelligencer's defense was that the picture and story had been published in good faith and without malice as legitimate news about a candidate for public office. They had not taken the photograph; it had been brought to the city editor's desk. Both the editor and the reporter who wrote the story refused to name their source; they were sentenced for contempt and spent a widely publicized week in jail—that was one of the duties of employees of *The Daily Intelligencer.*

All Blayn could plead was his hitherto unblemished reputation and his unverified account of the grotesque affair in his front hall. "In twenty years at the bar," exclaimed the defendant's lawyer dramatically, "I have never heard so imbecilic and incredible a story! My honorable colleague is wasted in our profession. With an imagination like his, he should be writing soap operas!"

The judge smiled and several of the jury laughed. The audience had

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to be quieted. Blayn lost his temper again and shouted abuse at his opponent. Then he too was threatened with contempt and had to make a grudging apology.

The jury took just half an hour to bring in a verdict against him, though it smugly deplored the sensationalism of the paper—which undoubtedly most of them read regularly.

A week later Blayn was served with notice of a hearing for disbarment proceedings, based on "moral turpitude and consequent notoriety." He did not even appear, and was duly disbarred.

By this time he had ceased to care; his life was in ruins.

Mary had gone from the hospital back to her parents' home, taking the baby with her. There was one dreadful scene there, when he shouted and she refused to speak to him and her father ordered him out of the house. After that she hung up on him when he phoned her, and the day he was disbarred he was served with divorce papers. To save her own dignity she gave the grounds as cruelty, not adultery, but the papers, TV, and radio had another field day.

He did not contest the divorce, and he paid heavy alimony without protest. He was given the most meagre visiting privileges for his son. A year later Mary remarried and moved to another city with her new husband, and the only communication he ever had with her again was a letter, which he never answered, telling him that her husband had adopted the boy legally and given him his name.

All Wilson Blayn had left was his inherited fortune and his bitter determination to track down and punish his enemy.

For a while he drank heavily and brooded alone in his hotel room. He sold the house in the suburban town and the furniture; Mary had stripped it of all her own possessions. He saw no one and hung up on the few who called him.

He was saved from utter disintegration by Pearl Harbor. He enlisted at once, was soon transferred to Officers' Training School, was posted in the South Pacific, and for three years was in the thick of combat. It became a hiatus in his crusade for revenge; he visited on the public enemy his rage at his private foe.

He emerged from the war unscathed, a Lieutenant Colonel with three medals and a rainbow of campaign ribbons. For a while he thought of remaining in the army. But with peace his obsession for revenge came back to him; he thirsted to return to civilian life and renew his pursuit of the unknown man who had wrecked his life.

He made only one more attempt to reinstate himself in the world of normal people. He began to cast about for something to occupy his time. He still avoided company,

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and he wanted no occupation that would force him to mingle with other people. Finally he settled on accounting, and signed up for courses in City College.

His mind was as good as ever, and he passed with distinction. He had some difficulty in taking the examination for certification, because of his disbarment; but his war record saved him.

He was certified, and opened an office as a public accountant. He could afford to pick and choose his clients; what he wanted was big impersonal firms where he would have few direct personal contacts. He was more bitter and more desirous of solitude than ever. His leisure he gave to the patient hunt for his enemy.

Three years later Blayn had built up a flourishing business and a solid reputation. What setbacks he had were because of his low boiling point and his rude arrogance. The whole sorry affair of the frameup and the disastrous suit seemed to have faded from everybody's consciousness—except his own.

And then calamity struck again.

Suddenly, within a week, all his biggest customers abruptly terminated their connection with him. Most of them refused to give any reason except that they were "no longer satisfied" and had decided to employ another accountant. Three told him stiffly that "on confidential and reliable information received" they no longer considered him an asset. All of them flatly refused to say more, and it only made things worse when in each case he stormed into the offices and made an angry scene. He wound up his business, and thenceforth confined himself to the care of his own investments.

In a last effort to distract himself, Blayn set out on a world tour that in two years took him to almost every country on the globe. He tried to sink himself into travel, to think of nothing but the places he visited—their history, their points of interest, their natural beauties. It did no good. Underneath, there was always the festering sore, the consciousness of frustration.

Until he met Katherine Wilmot.

That was in Egypt, and appropriately they met at the buried feet of the Sphinx. Katherine was English, no longer a young girl, handsome rather than pretty, a woman with an independence to match his own. She had never married. For the first time since Mary, Wilson Blayn felt a stirring of interest in a woman.

The fierce hostility with which he had been greeting his fellow beings had calmed a bit under the influence of time and change of environment. Almost without knowing it, against his conscious desire and for the first time in his life, he fell deeply in love. When Katherine went home he followed her. Six months later they were engaged to be married.

Katherine was Somebody, con-

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nected by blood with important people. The newspapers played up the engagement, and an enterprising correspondent sent a notice to America. The papers in his home city caught it and gave it front-page attention. *The Daily Intelligencer* ran the notorious picture again, and rehashed the whole nauseating story.

It was most unlikely that Katherine or anyone she knew would ever see *The Daily Intelligencer*. But two copies did go to England, sent anonymously. One went to him, one to her.

She listened to his account calmly, and she believed it. But she was proud and fastidious. To marry a divorced American was bad enough; but she could not face involving herself in this kind of background. Sadly but implacably she broke their engagement.

Now Blayn knew definitely that somewhere he had a relentless ruthless enemy, who would never allow him to build up an endurable life for himself.

He returned to his home city with only one objective—to find out who, and why, and to strike him down.

He became a fanatic. He combed his memory for every episode of his past that could conceivably have caused affront to anyone. There were plenty of them; he had always had a hot temper, badly disciplined. He followed up every name he could dig out of the recesses of recollection—college classmates, political associates, clients and opponents in legal cases, girls he had gone around with before he met Mary (though it seemed most unlikely that this was a feminine plot), every member of Mary's family and her close friends in the days of his courtship.

He made long journeys to distant cities to consult records; he followed up every name to the point where it was impossible to consider it further. Some were dead, some had left the city many years ago and had lost all contact with it, some—a judge, a senator, a clergyman, a professor—even to his jaundiced eye were improbable in the role.

Years crept by, and his hopeless search became Wilson Blayn's only interest in life. He hid himself in his shabby hotel, ate sparingly, grew careless of his appearance, ceased to have any but the most cursory relations with other human beings. He was undoubtedly a little mad. But he was safe from interference, for he still could and did manage his financial affairs sensibly, and he became richer rather than poorer.

So the years went on—five, ten, fifteen. Still the search continued, though his adversary had made no further move against a ruined man. Perhaps a professional detective could have accomplished more; and if he had had a good lead he would have hired one, but he shrank from even that invasion of his privacy.

And at last, almost by accident, he struck pay dirt.

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He was getting near the end of his list of possible suspects. In desperation he began to think of his own family.

He knew very little about them, from the circumstances of his alienated boyhood. When he grew old enough to be curious and asked his legal guardian, the bank official was of little help. Blayn knew his father's given names—Lucius Edwin—and his mother's maiden name—Harriet Wilson. He had had a grandfather who had been the founder of the family fortune, and from old directories he discovered a few Blayns, with that unusual spelling (Wilsons were hopeless; there were too many of them), for 70-odd years back. He began a systematic survey of the city records.

He found odd bits of information, and significant bits of lack of information. From the latter he gathered that his father must have been an only child. That stood to reason, anyway—if there had been aunts or uncles or even first cousins on either side, surely one of *them* would have been made his guardian, or at the very least would have come forward after his parents' death.

The clerk in the Hall of Records was used by now to his almost daily presence. The records were open to the public, but only Wilson Blayn was so constant an inquirer. To avoid curiosity, Blayn had told the clerk that he was a professional genealogist, looking up data for clients.

He was down to futile, desperate measures by now, having exhausted all others. He started methodically with the year of his own birth and plodded through all the volumes of births from A to Z, in the hope of finding a clue—a name he would recognize that he had forgotten. He himself knew that this was sheer insanity—his persecutor, whose very name he hoped might activate a new train of memories, might have been born anywhere, at any time. But he couldn't stop—by this time, to stop would have been to die. This ceaseless hunt at least kept him alive.

And then, two years after he had been born, all the way into the S's, he suddenly caught sight of his father's name.

It was in the record of birth of one Julian Snow, son of Claribelle Snow and Lucius Edwin Blayn. Illegitimate, but acknowledged.

With the blinding certainty of a lightning stroke, Wilson Blayn realized now what must have been the true nature of that fatal "accident" which had cost him both his parents before he was three years old. He could visualize the bitterness, the anger, the quarrels. In that last drive together, whose hand was on the steering wheel, or whose hand snatched the other away and headed the car over the cliff? He would never know; but he was convinced the deaths of his mother and father were murder and suicide.

Now he understood, too, the reason for the inexorable persecu-

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tion. It became crystal clear when he got the report of the expensive, efficient detective he employed.

Julian Snow had not been difficult to trace. Blayn was given his address, his history, his physical description —everything except the least shred of legal evidence against him.

After all, they were sons of the same father; they had personality traits in common. In Snow's place, Blayn would have felt the same way, perhaps acted the same way, though his natural response would have been violence rather than deviousness: they shared ambition and pride and deep-seated resentment of wrong.

Blayn had no doubt that the father who had acknowedged an illegitimate son must at the time have provided financially for the mother, made some kind of settlement on them. Perhaps he had intended to leave, discreetly, a sufficient sum to insure Julian's welfare and education. But he had not had time; the will he had made out at Wilson's birth still stood. Perhaps it was a quarrel over that which had led to the final catastrophe. Blayn had no idea what Claribelle Snow had meant to Lucius Blayn—whether he loved her and wanted a divorce from his wife to marry her, or whether Julian was the result of a casual indiscretion.

So Wilson Blayn had spent his boyhood at exclusive boarding schools, with conducted tours and cruises during the long vacations; he had gone to the very best college and law school; he had never had to give a moment's thought to the cost of food or lodging or clothing or any other need. He had had no trouble in finding a place in an important law firm. He had married a girl from the same social and financial circles in which he had always lived, and she bore him a son. He had bought a house in a gilt-edge suburb, and if he lived modestly it was by his own taste and not from necessity. When his ambition turned to politics, he had every prospect of complete success. Even after he had been disgraced, he had easily become an officer in the army. And he was tall, good-looking, well-built, athletic. He had had everything.

But Julian Snow, with an equally fine mind and an equally proud spirit, had had the bad public schooling of a slum district. He had never been able to go beyond high school; he had had to find a job to support his mother, an invalid for years before she died. He had never been able to put anything aside beyond bare subsistence: what small ambitions he had achieved had been at the expense of grueling toil. He had married a girl as poor as he was; the marriage had not been successful —she had divorced him after three years, and he had never remarried. They had no children. He lived in one room in a cheap boarding house. He had inherited brains and personality from the senior Blayne, but physically he was a Snow—and the Snows were short, running to un-

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healthy obesity, suffering frequently from an asthmatic tendency. He had been rejected at his medical examination in the draft. He had had nothing.

And the only difference between the two half brothers was that one of them was legitimate.

Was it any wonder, then, that he had hated with a brooding jealousy the brother he had never seen, or that his warped mind had plotted a revenge as tortuous as it was surreptitious?

There were other indications too of Julian Snow's having been the author of all Wilson Blayn's misfortunes. For Snow was by trade a free-lance news photographer. He had in consequence a wide acquaintance among newspaper people, and doubtless often earned extra sums for supplying news tips or gossip to sheets like *The Daily Intelligencer.* And he could have found out through his contacts which firms were employing Blayn.

The indictment was complete—but there was not one bit of proof to substantiate it. And even if there had been, or if it could be discovered, what good would it do now, when one brother's mind was as sick as the other's, to smear their father's name in a court of law?

There were no damages to be had from Julian Snow. There were no damages to be had from anyone for 30 years of a devastated life. The revelation to which Wilson Blayn had devoted nearly half his years had after all brought him nothing worth having.

If Blayn had learned his father's secret early in life, when he was young and optimistic, he would in all probability have acted very differently. His lonely boyhood had cooled and hardened him, but he would still have been capable then of understanding and compassion. He was too proud and too ambitious ever to have acknowledged his half brother openly, but he would have felt it a debt to his father to see that Julian Snow was well provided for.

But it was too late now. Their father had eaten sour grapes, and both his children's teeth were set on edge.

It was almost a disappointment to know the truth. Life had lost its savor for Blayn now that he no longer had the stimulus of the constant search. The only interest it held any more was to plan a perfect punishment and revenge.

Then suddenly he became obsessed by the fear that Snow would die before him, and so triumph over him again. Snow was two years younger, but for many reasons he was more liable to disease or accident. And they were both in late middle-age by now—58 and 56. He must hurry.

Blayn had been disbarred long ago, but he still retained his legal ability. He knew how to draw up a will that could not be broken in any court in the country.

He read it over with profound

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satisfaction before putting it in the hands of the bank that, like his father's, was his executor.

It left his whole fortune to "my brother, Julian Snow"—let them enjoy the scandal once he was dead, to make sure it would rebound on Snow himself, with his own name cleared.

But it was left on one condition.

"He is to make a sworn affidavit to the following effect: that in 1935 he was solely responsible for a frameup by which I was photographed in a compromising position with a woman unknown to me, in consequence of which and as a result of the ensuing publicity I lost my wife and child, was disbarred by the State Bar Association, and forfeited any aspiration to political office; that in 1940 he furnished false information which resulted in the collapse of my career as an accountant; that in 1950 he inspired further damaging publicity which caused the breaking of my engagement to remarry; that his activating motive in all these actions was resentment and jealousy arising from the fact that I was the legitimate and he the illegitimate son of Lucius Edwin Blayn, and that in consequence I had received means and opportunities which had been denied him; that we never met and that until recently I was even unaware of his existence.

"This affidavit is to be inserted in every newspaper of this city as a paid advertisement, in bold-face type, and particularly in *The Daily Intelligencer;* and certified copies of it are to be sent to my former wife, now Mary Hallimund, to my son, now known as Edwin Hallimund, and to Katherine Wilmot, all of whose addresses will be given to him by my executor.

"If the said Julian Snow does not fulfill in every detail this condition of this, my last will and testament, my entire estate is to revert to the government, since there is no charitable or other organization which I care to have benefit by it."

There was one more thing.

Blayn went to the most outstanding psychiatrist he could learn of, and requested a complete and exhaustive mental examination. He paid for and got a signed statement that he was entirely competent mentally to dispose of his property. He filed this statement with his will.

Now, he reflected triumphantly, let Julian Snow struggle between pride and greed! He was sure greed (or even, he thought callously, pure need) would win. Wilson Blayn would be vindicated. Mary and their son, and Katherine, would know the truth and be shamed for their lack of faith and loyalty.

All that remained was to make certain that he died before Julian.

The chambermaid found him in bed the next morning, his head under a pillow to muffle the sound, a bullet through his brain.

For the first time in all the years she had seen him daily, he seemed to be smiling.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 295th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a beautifully written story for a "first"—sophisticated, witty, civilized, in a style all the author's own (every phrase, sentence, and implied social comment).

A letter from the author, Mrs. Kathryn Gottlieb, was just as individualistic in its turn of phrase and in revealing Mrs. Gottlieb's turn of mind. Here are some quotations: "I am a business woman in a small way (circuit-riding sub-accountant) . . . I live with my husband and two daughters in a reformed farmhouse, suburban New Jersey. My major interest lies in the planning field: local, regional, and cosmic . . . I read many books—enjoy among the living, Frank O'Connor and Brian Moore, and among those gone to their reward, S. Butler and J. Conrad . . . Hobbies: sloth, gluttony, and gardening. Have large underfoot collection of very old and totally worthless books . . . That's all, image-wise . . ."

No, that's not all, image-wise or other-wise. There's more, much more, than meets the eye on the printed page . . .

AN EXTREMELY CIVILIZED MURDER

by KATHRYN GOTTLIEB

I WAS ON MY KNEES WHEN THE telephone rang, squinting at a roll of set designs; cost-cutting. There was no one else in the office, Blonde having gone downstairs to fetch me the usual container of cardboard coffee and a sandwich. So without looking up I reached for the noise and in one move grappled the phone off the hook and lassoed an open bottle of Higgins red ink onto the floor. I crouched there watching the red sea roll over the blueprints, and then I shouted a venerable word into the phone.

A familiar voice answered me deep, self-assured, amused; full of sand and sunshine. "Tom Elliott," it said, "you never change!"

Tony Comstock, of course. I inquired if I might call him back, wherever he was, and was refused permission.

"Then hang on," I told him. "You've caught me at a bad time." I tossed the phone onto the floor, reached up for a blotter (fools never learn), thereby causing a boxful of drawing pins to fly through the air in a fine deadly spray—at which

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point Blonde marched in with my lunch, gave me a patient look, said, "Clumsy, clumsy," as she set the sandwich on the desk, and Tony, unwanted on the floor, began to whistle.

I picked up the phone and told him with real sincerity that I would have to call him back. But no; he had just got back from France, spear-fishing south of Arcachon—a charmingly desolate spot on the Bay of Biscay that tourists hadn't found yet—and he had to talk to me right away. Resigned, I sat down. It was going to take less time to talk to him than to convince him I didn't have time to.

"Look," he said, "knock off for five minutes. Sit back. Unwind."

"You—"

"And don't tell me I never had to meet a payroll."

"You never had to meet a payroll."

"I toil not neither do I spin. It gets to be a bore." I'll bet. "That's a great little business you've built up there, Tom, and you know it. How are things going? What are you working on?"

"Well," I told him with some pride, "we've just got a contract for a series of one-minute teevee spots for Tastee-Foam Soap. And six half-minutes for Cur-Few Tablets."

"Sounds great. Would that be a canine contraceptive or something for insomniacs?"

"Both. Prevents puppies while you sleep."

"Tch. And imagine you making television commercials. Now that really is a degrading occupation."

"Only in the eyes of the world. Come on, Tony, what's on your mind?"

What was on his mind was that he desired me to come up that Saturday, with friend, to his new beach house at Taylor's Point on the Sound, somewhere east of Stamford, and stay for the week-end. Tansy Williams would be there, and a friend of Tony's from London: drinks, laughter, and jolly-ho. Also rosy-cheeked exercise; we would shoot some ducks.

I was tempted. I had not yet met Tansy Williams, voted Model-of-the-Year (this year) by the New York Fashion Photographers Association, and while she's Tony's girl and I have mine, I do feel that the human eye cannot too frequently on beauty dwell. Tansy has the skeletal good looks the photo-boys admire—the hollow cheeks, the haunted eyes, the sneer. You have seen her yourself at regular intervals in your favorite magazine, dressed for a Coronation and posed upright and haughty in the doorway of the Megalomanian Embassy, waiting there with misplaced confidence for the Rolls that has just poked its clearly labeled snout into the lower left-hand corner of the scene but never (May through September) gets any closer; she is offering you

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a four-color hashish dream for the price of a mentholated cigarette. And you buy it, all you merry fools.

"Well?" said Tony.

"Nix." I had serious work under way, I told him; a series of taped interviews with a famous public figure I have revered since school days, a marvelous old gent, a professional wise-old-man-of-letters who not only enjoys posing as same but really is one. Cornball as it may sound, I think he has something to say to our times and I want to be the one to put him on the little screen; to let that mind express itself to a large public at uninhibited length. I don't want to drag his well-known name into this sordid affair, so I'll call him Henry Richardson; Sir Henry it is, and no, it's not really Robert Graves.

My Sir Henry lives on the little island of Ibiza off the coast of Spain, and a man working out of the office of a Paris affiliate was negotiating with him for me. I had been boning up on his life and works, had a skeleton script in readiness, and was expecting to fly over there for talks the moment the word came through. This is a new sort of venture for me; I expect to lose money on the series, but that will be my contribution to the cause of Humanity for this year. Really, I was in no mood for week-end house parties in Connecticut.

I explained to Tony. He heard me with patience, commended my serious mind and elevation of character, then insisted once more that I had to come up. Bring my girl with me—Mandy? Mindy?

She called herself Mandy last year and Mindy this, I told him. It was thoughtful—and characteristic—of Tony to remember her. We would come up and play another time, I said.

This Saturday, said Tony. Wouldn't I like to see the new beach house? Miles van der Pride had designed it, Tony had approved the plans in a feeble-minded moment before leaving for France in April and the thing had turned out frank-lloyd wrong. To add to which, Tansy Williams had furnished the place in his absence, from pictures she had admired in a magazine.

"I gave her a blank check and a free hand," said Tony. "She wants to give up modeling—says she's always hungry—and go into decorating. I must have been crazy, but I thought, what the hell. She wanted so badly to do it. You'll see. Every cliché in the book. Black. Brown. Angles. Cubes. Makes you want to howl. And I can't change a thing because she's so proud of it all." He was kind, in his way, was Tony. "Come on up," he said again. "Come see."

"Sounds vile, but I can't come."

Tony sighed; I sensed a shift in position; he was not about to give up. Why was he trying so hard? What was he trying to set up?

"Look," he said, "I'll say it plain. I need you up there. Bring your

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work if you have to. Bill Chatfield will be there—maybe you can do some business with him"—this last in a bright, dishonest tone.

"Who's he?"

"English friend. Flying in from London this week. Husband of a friend, I should say." Then, in a metered-out tone that withheld volumes, "Husband of a dead friend."

Trouble with living Tony's kind of life, after a while he can't take no for an answer. Trouble with living my kind of life, I don't really have time to argue. So in the end, of course, I said I'd come up—but packed and ready to take off if my call from Ibiza, or from the agent in Paris, came through. Fair enough, said Tony.

By the time I put down the phone. Blonde was on her knees mopping up the ink with a perfectly good hand towel and a righteous expression. I glared down at her. Damn Tony, damn Tastee-Foam, damn Cur-Few Tablets, damn the sixty-hour week.

"You," said Blonde in her usual placid tone, "may be handsome beyond mending, but oh you are ill-natured. I know I wouldn't beg you to come anywhere with me." She wagged her pretty head. "No, indeedy. I wouldn't spend five minutes with you if I weren't getting paid for it. Eaten with envy. Whining for money."

"Maybe you can tell me how I can make a dollar? Or save a penny?"

"Simple," she said. "Fire me. I'll be glad to go." She straightened up, grunting like an old lady, holding the inky towel at arm's length away from her.

Without Blonde I couldn't run the office. Honesty being the best policy, I said, "My, you're a pretty girl."

"I know," she answered serenely. She went out and closed the door behind her. My coffee was cold and the sandwich was wet.

I called Mindy-Mandy. She is a girl—my girl—with the face of a hungry angel who had come to New York from a little town way over the river in Jersey to seek her fortune. She models $400 dresses, works mornings in an office where she types badly and fetches coffee splendidly, reads widely—lunch hours—in anthropology, and haunts producers' offices at all other times. She is chic, crazed with ambition, and a stony-hearted pillar of virtue. She refused flat-out to go up to Tony's for the week-end.

"You're safe," I told her coldly. "Safe, safe, safe. I don't like skinny girls with great big eyes."

"Oh, it isn't that! I mean—it is and it isn't. I know you wouldn't take unfair advantage, Tom, or even fair advantage because you are a gentleman to your boot-tops in spite of being so exhaustingly good-looking. But I just can't leave here, not this week-end. I have something awesome to tell you, Tom. My Big Chance Has Come At Last."

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"Never mind that. You come with me. Just for two miserable days. Be my fresh-air kid. Boat on Sound. Swim. Sunshine. Kill ducks?"

"Ugh. How can you? Poor little—"

"I only shoot bad ducks. Never the good."

"Tom, be quiet. I'm not going with you. You're just not listening to me at all. You won't believe what's happened. It's so important it's grotesque." Her voice sank to an awestruck whisper. "The Weather Girl on Channel Something-or-Other is sick and I—" Her voice died quite away.

"You're going to do the weather broadcast."

"Highs. Lows. Everything."

"Wonderful." And I meant it. I was glad for her, and sorry for me.

"You don't mind my not going? You do still, you know, love me?"

"Nope. You can't have everything."

"Don't tease. It means so much to me. The weather thing, I mean. I'm frightened."

"I like you to be frightened."

"No, really. I really am. Suppose I forget the temperature?"

"Make it an even hundred."

"I do dislike you," she said, her voice quite restored. "You are really, really, a monster of unkindness." Which being her belief, although in turn I am both kind and good, I was obliged to drive up to Tony's place alone.

I worked till 3:30 on Saturday, then jammed my airweight case full of all the Richardson material—books, clippings, everything I could put my hands on—and headed up the Merritt Parkway through a driving rainstorm. I was looking forward, with my usual annoyance and pleasure, to seeing Tony again.

He and I had first met a dozen or more years before as fellow boarders in a boy's school near Zurich; my father was at that time a lowly wage earner with a world-wide charity headquartered in Geneva, and Tony—written out, Anthony Loden Comstock III—was being brought up by two banks and a law firm, his parents having been killed some years before when the family plane nosed into a Wyoming mountainside. An exotic misfortune, it seemed to me then, but I suppose it left Tony as much alone as if they had been run over by a subway train.

The only two Americans in that school, we were friends as soon as we met, the rich kid and the simon-poor, drawn firmly together by our American background, language, and interests, as well as the general obtuseness of the other inmates over such things as football vs. soccer, and so on; the misunderstandings that separate nations. In addition, Tony was—then—a likeable, simple-natured, good-humored, sometimes witty boy. He was going to be a handsome one, I remember my mother saying, when his face grew

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up to meet his features, which she described as chiseled. She felt sorry for him; she brought him home-made cookies and paperback Al Capps—the sort of thing the law firm and bankers didn't get around to.

After the Zurich years I went to Midwestern U. and Tony frittered around—Oxford, the Sorbonne, Madrid; he ended up quadrilingual, without a degree or ambition, owner of a forty-foot split-rig ketch, the Mediterranean his private pond, or as good as, and all the time in the world. I think it was that last I envied him, as much as the money. I was proud of my little producing company, or thought I was, until Tony called, as he did, always, when he hit New York; and then all the blood-sweat-and-tears in that grimy little office, all the sponsor haggling, all the scrabble for money—my chosen way of life—turned to ashes; and just for the moment I would envy Tony all that sweet unearned dough, all that *dolce vita*, so much I could scarcely be civil. . .

At the Westport exit I turned off the parkway and began a long wander in the early twilight through a maze of winding roads, chic-ly unlabeled. It occurred to me that not only the roads were devious; Tony had become so. It was plain that he needed me there that week-end not for the sweet pleasure of my company; I had a most disagreeable sense of being manipulated. I was disturbed, curious, edgy.

Tony's house was the last on a dead-end road, and when I switched off the engine and sat yawning I heard, in the sudden quiet, on be-yond the house and out of sight in the evening haze, the waters of the Sound lapping at the shore. I got out of the car, stretched, and regarded my host's house. It was a high-style example of the New Ugliness—an oblong box, apparently windowless, set off the ground on lollipop legs and painted a heart-broken gray. Genuine Nouveau Outhouse it looked, and it must have cost a fortune. Well, I thought sourly, Tony could afford a $50,000 mistake. I hunted around the con-traption for a flight of stairs, found some, climbed same, banged on the door, and walked in.

And there was Tony, large as life, looking fit, as our British cousins say, and tanned as an Indian. And—where was the advertised house party?—he was alone. He greeted me with subdued amiability, the manner cordial and the mind else-where. I looked at him sharply as he fixed our drinks. Tanned and fit he might be, but there were new little lines around his mouth as though he had been wearing it per-manently turned down at the corners. It was a petulant, poor-little-rich-boy expression, and it occurred to me that if I were just then meeting Tony for the first time, I should have disliked him at sight.

The interior of Tony's house ap-

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peared to consist of a single large room, styled with psycho-whimsy to frighten and depress. A large expanse of uncurtained glass gave onto the waters of the Sound. The furniture was sparse and flashy-simple; low-slung or no-slung—that last being a lineup of wrestlers' mats (could it possibly be?) before the gray uneasy view. Said furniture all covered—forgive me, forgive me, dear Mother Machree—in black and tan.

Tony waved an apologetic hand at it all, and smiled faintly. "There's not a thing I can do about it." His tone was rueful, illuminated by some of his old warmth of manner. "Tansy's beside herself with pride. Whole blasted silly place is unusable. All for show. Now you come take a look over here."

He strode to the end of the room and flung open a door. "This is where I have to live." There in a room not eight feet square stood an army cot, a battered chest, two sets of bookshelves, and a tabledesk piled half a foot deep with papers, pamphlets, timetables, pipes, ash-trays, tobacco, and socks.

"Where's the author of it all? Isn't Tansy supposed to be here?"

Tony shrugged, and his smile vanished. "Not coming. She's working tonight. She's been understudy for a part in 'Snake-Light' for about six months. And tonight, tonight, Tansy goes on. Thrilled to death, naturally. Doesn't care about me, this, anything. Absolutely ridden with ambition."

I couldn't help being amused. "Same with Mindy. Same thing exactly. That's the way it goes. What can you do?"

Tony's mouth drew down at the corners. "She knows I needed her here," he said. "I told her so. Every damn thing's gone wrong. Everything."

Well, let the week-end not be a total loss; I might as well spend some time bouncing the Richardson ideas off Tony's head; hash things over a bit; clarify my own thinking. I made a pass at clearing a place on his desk and upended my Richardson satchel onto it.

"Looks interesting," said Tony. We talked about the series for a while. I was thinking of following the Richardson talks with others, other men, other greats. Tony made a show of interest, inquired in his kindly, abstracted manner if I needed financing, and then talk petered out. He suggested another drink, and as we stood up to walk into the Great Room again—that being, apparently, the drinking area—I paused to admire three shotguns that appeared to be sleeping on Tony's cot. They were angled across each other all anyhow, as if they had been thrown there. One had a beautifully carved walnut stock. I fingered it.

"Careless," I said. "That's going to get all the hell scratched up."

"Come on inside," said Tony, his voice sharp.

We sat and drank and time jolted

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along; a rush of talk, a rush of silence. Tony paced the room, he stood, he sat, he sprang up to pace again.

"All right," I said finally. "What's on your mind? Out with it."

"Nothing."

Silence.

"What about your friend?"

Blank look.

"That fellow from England. Is he in my line of work? What's the story?"

Tony frowned. "He's not coming. He cabled this afternoon—can't get here till next week-end." He gave me a thoughtful, impersonal glance. "And so you'll have to come again. Everything goes wrong. Every damn thing."

I must have looked my annoyance.

"I'm sorry." Tony smiled, a warm and charming smile out of the past; Tony as I remembered him. "I know I dragged you up here when you were busy but—well, things haven't worked out the way I planned." He filled our glasses. "I have playmates all over the world, Tom, but no friends. No one to talk to when there's something on my mind."

"Nonsense."

"True." Tony smiled. "Trouble with you, you don't really believe the rich can have troubles."

"Sure they can. I guess."

"That's what I mean. But I can tell you—" he gestured impatiently —"money can't bring you what you want. At least, it hasn't for me. At first you think it's so damn simple. Sign a check and the world is yours. Well, maybe that's the way it ought to be, but that's the way it's not. What I've really wanted I haven't got."

"Well, if you're bent on feeling sorry for yourself—"

"Take this damn week-end. You, your friend Change-'er-name, Tansy Williams, Bill Chatfield. I went to great lengths to arrange this—great lengths. And who's here? You."

"Best laid plans," I said, nettled.

Tony filled his own glass. "I'll tell you something," he said slowly. "I'd like your opinion. Something about Bill Chatfield." His tone seemed guarded. "He's a nice enough chap. With a banking firm in London. Just spent a week on the French coast with me, spearfishing."

"What about his wife? You told me he was the husband of a dead friend."

Tony frowned. "She was not my friend. Not ever. Not really."

"How did she die? Accident? Illness?"

He gave me a sharp, bright, decisive glance. Here it comes, I thought. This is why he got me me here.

"No accident," said Tony. "She was murdered."

Off and running: we talked about Jean Chatfield all night. The murder had taken place in the Chatfields' house in London while Tony and

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Bill were fishing south of Arcachon. The police had not a clue; no arrest had been made. It was, said Tony, looking at me with a certain relish, an extremely civilized murder.

The police had been tipped off by an anonymous phone call no more than an hour or two after the murder. She had been killed, they found, by a neat blow behind the ear.

"She hardly seemed damaged at all," said Tony.

I must have looked startled.

Tony laughed. "How do I know? I attended the funeral with Chatfield. Naturally."

The police, answering the call, had found the house unlocked. They walked in and found her seated at a game table in the library. "It's a small table, with a chessboard inlaid. Teakwood—Indian, I think. Bits of ivory set in."

He went on to tell me that a deck of cards was spread out before her in a half-finished game of solitaire. The Queen of Hearts, he told me, half smiling, was missing. He paused, looking at me. Amused, keyed up, waiting for comment.

"An arty touch," I murmured. I was uncomfortable.

" 'Artistic' is the word. And there's more. She was wearing a crown cut out of gilt paper. The man who killed her must have put it on her head. Beautiful long dark hair, she had. A nice thought, wasn't it? A gilt crown for a guilty woman."

"Bad pun," I said shortly. I wanted a change of topic, and the drinks were beginning to hit me. "Any food in this place?"

In a small opening off the gun-cot-sock-and-desk-room was a two-burner grill. Tony blackened us each a pair of hamburgers, we swallowed some coffee, and he started right in again on Jean Chatfield. Nothing new, just the same tape over and over again.

I couldn't think what to say, that I hadn't said before. "It does seem a pity," I remarked, "for a beautiful girl to die so young. I suppose she was beautiful?"

"Beautiful."

"And I suppose whoever killed her was someone she was having an affair with. Sounds like that sort of thing."

Tony laughed abruptly. "Not that one," he said. "Not Jean."

"Why not? What kind of woman was she?"

"Cold," said Tony. "Cold, and a tease. Actually, I had a brief—a brief little thing with her myself. She gave and she took away." He sighed abruptly. "She deserved what happened to her."

"That's a hell of a thing to say."

He looked away from me. "It's Bill I'm sorry for," he said. He crushed out one cigarette, then lit another.

"I suppose he's in a bad state about it?"

Tony nodded. "What I really had in mind—I thought when Bill got here—well, to begin with, the girls,

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just all of us being together, would take his mind off things, divert him a bit. And then, early tomorrow, the three of us could have taken ourselves over to Sunrise Island and bagged some ducks. Get his mind, you know, clean off it. But nothing works out. Nothing."

He flung himself back into his chair and stared down at the floor in an attitude of dejection, his slender hands dangling at his sides. Then he shuddered and looked up.

"This is between you and me, Tom. You won't ever let it get any further? It's a—well, a police matter."

I was uneasy. "Do you think you ought to say anything more?"

"I've got to tell someone. This has all been a great burden." He pushed his hair back off his forehead with a nervous hand. "You see, the police questioned him—being her husband, you know. And I did what I thought was necessary. My place is in an isolated spot—no servants, no witnesses—so I let the police understand that we had spent the preceding twenty-four hours in each other's company. That he was there, at Arcachon, the whole time—the time, that is, when Jean was being killed.

"Truth of the matter is, I have no idea where Bill really was that night. You see, I wasn't actually there myself. I had run up to Paris the night before the murder. Met up with a girl I know, and stayed over. I got back to Arcachon the following evening—an hour, less than an hour, before the police came to inform him of Jean's death. It was pretty awful. He went perfectly white. And very still—like a dead man himself. Terrible look on his face. I can't describe it."

Tony shook his head rapidly. "At any rate, the police were satisfied. After they left, Bill had nothing to say to me. You'd think he'd have said something. But no. Nothing. I asked him what he'd been doing while I was in Paris. He thought it over a while, then said he'd been restless and had driven up the coast maybe a hundred miles and back again—and that was not like Bill, I can tell you, no destination, just driving, burning up miles and time. Not like him at all."

"In plain words, Tony, you think he killed her?"

He shrugged and looked at the floor in silence.

"Was there time for him to get to London, kill her, and get back to Arcachon before you did?"

"He could have made it, if he had left immediately after I did. Understand, I'm not saying he did. You see"—his voice was strained—"for all I know he went and found her that way. But, what the hell, I know what I think. He was crazy jealous, and that's the truth. Tom, what shall I do?"

It was late, I was tired, groggy with drink, and there was enough trouble in the world. "Nothing.

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Do nothing, Tony. You said she deserved it."

"He's coming here next weekend."

"Let it rest."

He slumped back then in his chair and smiled, his open, warm, candid smile. I had set his mind at ease, if not my own. He looked fresh as a daisy.

"It's the job of the police," I said. "They'll come to you if they need you."

"Yes," said Tony thoughtfully. "Yes, they will. Well, thank you, Tom. It's been good to talk things out."

At six a.m. the telephone rang. It was a beautiful morning in Ibiza, and Sir Henry had decided to give the interview. I got busy on the phone myself, managed to pick up a flight reservation, scooped up my books and papers off Tony's desk, stuffed them back into my overnight case, and said goodbye to him. I was green with fatigue, but triumphant.

Tony walked out to the car with me. In the early morning light he looked pale but serene. The little lines around his mouth had smoothed out remarkably. He thanked me for coming up.

"I'll see you when I get back," I said.

Ibiza was another world.

Sir Henry was a magnificent old man; courtly, bawdy, clever, and wise. And talkative. He had never before consented to appear on any talk-show—never would, he had firmly stated—and now, having capriciously decided to accept my offer, he was as excited as a boy about the whole thing, in a ferment of ideas—and not in the least interested, at the moment, in looking over my notes; he was too full of oddly angled, provocative thoughts of his own.

We talked steadily through the day of my arrival. He insisted on my moving up from the hotel, so I spent the next two nights at his villa, a rambling, whitewashed stone house, thick-walled, cool and dim, with a Spanish wife and two shockingly young children floating round its farther reaches. On my second day there he led me on a leisurely ramble round the beaches and villages of the island. I had to put New York behind me, he said, before I could think properly. I trustingly blanked out the picture of the work piling up on my desk back on Forty-seventh street. And I thought not at all about Tony.

On my third day Sir Henry declared himself ready to look at my notes, and for the first time there I opened my attaché case, still full of all the material I had hastily swept into it from the top of Tony's desk in that faraway house and time in Connecticut. I upended the case onto Sir Henry's desk. The small book-strewn study remains in my memory as having the aspect, at that moment, of a super-heated

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Vermeer; white-walled, the long golden beams of northern sunlight striking onto the floor through a tall window at my left. Light lay across the desk.

I saw that I had scooped up some of Tony's things with mine; a couple of airline schedules, that could only have been his, and a few sheets of paper scribbled over in the handwriting I remembered from school days—it hadn't changed much, larger perhaps, more erratic, the penstrokes carved into the paper.

First time through, I failed to find the sheet of notes that I was looking for. Second time through, I looked more carefully. I lifted papers and pamphlets, shook them.

A playing card slipped from the pages of an airline schedule and fell face downward on the desk. I stared at it, at the design of it, an arabesque of red and blue, for what must have been a long time. I had no wish to touch it. Sir Henry's white, aged hand, freckled, veined, reached out and turned it over.

"Well," said Sir Henry. "The Queen of Hearts." He looked at me. "Not your favorite card, I take it. You're looking rather odd, you know." Concern touched his voice. "You're not ill?"

"No. Oh, no. It's just—I'm sorry. I've got to think." I sat down on a stool next to the desk and clasped my hands. "I'm sorry," I said again.

I stood up again and walked to the window and ran my fingers over the rough cement of the deep embrasure. It was warm to the touch. My hand, I noticed, was trembling. "I think—I'm thinking as I speak—that I was intended to witness an accident. At a gathering of friends. There was to have been an accident. Yes, that's it."

I was speaking with my back to that perceptive old man. "I listened to a man talk all through a night because he couldn't keep still. A pack of lies. He had to talk and in order to talk he had to twist things all around."

"And you've just realized this? Here? Now?"

"Yes—when you turned up the Queen of Hearts."

"How very curious."

A statement, only. The aged voice asked no question. But I went on. "A trophy, that's what it was. He kept it as a trophy." I turned round to face Sir Henry, forcing myself to smile. "I'm a bit shaken, you know?"

I went back to the desk and fingered the card. I saw clearly in my mind the beautiful capricious girl with the long black hair; a teakwood table and a game of solitaire; and the willful line of Tony's mouth.

That night, sleepless, I asked myself again and again—why had he left that card where I might find it? The fourteen-year-old Tony, I asked myself, the boy living on in the man—had he suffered a need for me—his near-brother—to know?

Confession is a heavy burden on the confessee. I stayed on and

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worked with Sir Henry, but the heart had gone out of me. I dreaded the return to New York and the responsibility that waited for me there. Until then, I told myself, let things wait. And what, in any case, was I going to do? I didn't know. Do nothing, I told myself. What happened had happened in another country. And I couldn't be sure of anything, not really. Not really.

But I felt no honest doubt.

I was miserable whenever I thought of it, and I thought of it all the time. I wound up the work with Sir Henry at the end of the week, but even then I didn't leave Ibiza right away. I took a room in the village and stayed on for two interminable days, lying on the beach, swimming a little, drinking without pleasure in the little dark bars. This is Tony's life, I told myself. This is what I have always envied. Astonished, I pitied him.

I got back to the office early Tuesday morning. Business was at a standstill and Blonde at the edge, she said, of the verge; she had done her best to cope but she couldn't make all the decisions: it's all bottlenecks, she said, and no bottles.

I plunged into work. I thrust Tony to the back of my mind. He refused to stay there. Two days of indecision. Then I took action. I asked Blonde to give me an outside line and I rang Tony's number. It had been disconnected.

I was profoundly relieved. That took it out of my hands.

Next afternoon I was sitting at my desk leafing through a trade magazine when my eye fell on an ad. A hunting scene. Two men. Mallards on the wing. Blonde walked in with a clutch of letters in her hand. "What's the matter?" she asked, staring at me.

"Nothing. Beat it."

She waved the letters at me.

"I don't want them now."

"You look terrible," she said. "Can I do anything?"

"Nobody can do anything," I said. "Look, sweetie, I've got to think, and you're a hazard."

She went out and left me alone. If Bill Chatfield was dead, I was to blame. Hunting, Tony had said, will distract him. I stared down at my desk and saw it all very clearly, saw it happening: the raw misty morning on Sunrise Island, the early sun red on the back of Tony's neck, the shotgun in his hands, then the flight of ducks beating up into the air over the heads of the two men, gun barrels swinging up, Chatfield's eyes on the birds, and the sharp reverberating crack; the ducks winging on through the sky and Bill Chatfield falling, the red stain spreading over his shirt.

A tragic accident.

Myself, by delaying, by putting off my clear plain duty, I had given Tony his second chance. Another civilized murder. On my head, this time. I opened the door to the outer office. "Catherine."

Blonde looked up from her desk.

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It was a long time since I had called her by the name on her employment application. She looked frightened.

"Has Tony Comstock called here? Tried to get in touch with me?"

She shook her head.

I went back into my office and shut the door. What was done was done. Tony by now would have vanished into some corner of the world as yet undiscovered by tourists, all his problems solved. How carefully he had planned it, I thought; the happy house party—an innocent setting for a most regrettable accident—the end of the matter. I had no doubt he had carried out his intention that past week-end, while I had lain in the sun in Ibiza. Chatfield had known the truth, and Chatfield had to die.

I could not live with it. I would somehow get hold of Tony, tell him I knew, and give him a chance to—

To what? Blow his brains out? Blow out mine?

That girl of his would know where he was. What was her name? I tried not to remember it, but it came to me, bidden but unwanted; Tansy Williams. I found her number in the book, but there was no answer to my ringing. Perhaps she'd gone off with him. No, not this trip; Tony wouldn't have involved her. He still had that much kindness. People are very complex.

I stared out of the window. Eighteen stories down, cars and trucks looked small. People looked small. The whole world looked small. What a decent kid he used to be, I thought.

That evening I called Tansy Williams again, and this time I found her in.

"Oh, yes," she said, when I told her my name. I was Tony's friend, he had spoken of me. I asked her where I could find him.

Dead silence.

I asked again.

"I don't understand," she said slowly. "Have you been out of town?"

"Yes." I took a deep breath. "What's happened?"

She answered me with another question. She wanted to know where I lived. I told her.

Her place was nearby and she thought I had better come over. She hung up before I could say no.

I walked. Slowly. Pushing the moment in front of me.

She must have been waiting for me. She opened the door the second I rang. She was almost as tall as me, with a sharp and elegant profile, a bony, beautiful, very well-known face. Off duty, she wore no makeup. "Tom Elliott? Come in."

"What about Tony? What happened?"

"We'll talk about Tony in a while," she said. "Let's just this minute talk about a couple of other things first. Anything. Come on in."

I sat down on a cluttered brown sofa.

"Drink? Coffee? Brandy-coffee?" Her voice was fashionably low,

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hoarse; it was also kind, and nervous.

I asked for a glass of water.

She brought ice water in a short glass, and poured a shot of bourbon into it. "Drink it," she said, and sat down next to me.

"How about you?"

She shook her head. "Can't drink. Eyes puff and I look corrupt. Photograph like sin."

I smiled. "Who named you Tansy?"

"He did. Tony. Halfway between a weed and a wildflower, he said." Her voice broke and she turned sharply away from me. She was crying.

"All right, Tansy," I said. "Now tell me. I can guess what happened. Where is he?"

"I loved him, Tom, do you know? I really did." She turned around and looked at me then. "But when I look back, I wasn't good to him. Not really. I was jealous of all that money, all that fun. He had so much of everything. I loved him and I wasn't even kind to him. I wish I had him back. Now," she said in a fierce whisper. "Now."

"I guess it's been that way for Tony with all his friends," I said. "Nothing's been simple for him. Or for them." Could I ask her again where he'd gone? I'm asking her to turn him in, I thought.

"He felt close to you," said Tansy. "Very close. You were his real friend, he told me, almost a brother. Your mother was kind to him, and he always remembered, do you know that? He always remembered. Poor, poor Tony."

I guess it was only then that I heard what she'd been telling me right along. "Look, Tansy," I said, my voice sounding harsh in my own ears. "Are you trying to tell me that Tony's *dead*?"

She brushed the tears from her cheeks. Her mouth was open and she was trying not to cry.

"He's dead. Is that what you mean?"

She nodded.

"Killed himself. Right?"

"He didn't! What made you think that?"

"But then what happened? How did he die? I don't understand!"

"He was duck hunting last weekend with a friend of his, somebody from England named Bill Chatfield. Tony had asked him over for the shooting. I picked Bill up Friday evening at the airport and we drove up to Connecticut. We were up most of the night. The men drank a lot. They both seemed in a funny mood. Tired and wound up at the same time. I don't know. Anyway, they got up early the next morning and went out to Sunrise Island. Chatfield tripped over his gun, or it went off somehow when it shouldn't have. I don't know how he could have been so careless. He's an experienced hunter. But I don't know anything about these things. It's not for me to judge. Tony was," she shook her head, once, quickly, her eyes fixed,

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"—Tony was destroyed. They had a closed coffin."

She buried her face in her hands.

I put my arm around her shoulders and pulled her gently to me. "So Chatfield killed him," I said. "Chatfield killed Tony." I couldn't take it in. Tony had set his trap; Chatfield had set his, and Tony had walked into it. Swift and terrible revenge, I thought inanely; swift and terrible.

Tansy went on. "I felt so sorry for him. For Bill Chatfield, I mean. At the funeral there were only Bill and someone from that firm of lawyers that raised Tony, and me. Just the three of us. Bill had the most terrible look on his face. I gathered he had been a pretty good friend of Tony's—not that you could get really close to Tony—you know how he was, and he was getting worse. He always had to have his own way. Like a spoiled child. I loved him," she said. She was crying again.

I put both arms around her bony fashionable shoulders and pulled her to me. "I know. He was very, very fond of you, Tansy."

I asked her what the police had done about the accident.

"They questioned Bill Chatfield, of course. But it was just routine. He was grief-stricken. Poor man. He had just lost his wife a short time ago, he told me. He seemed simply overwhelmed. There was never any doubt, of course, about the shooting being an accident. Bill is—well, you know, a man like yourself; too decent, too civilized for it to be anything else but an accident. What conceivable reason could he have had for wanting to kill Tony? On purpose, I mean. What motive could there possibly be?"

"None," I said. Let Tony rest. "None at all."

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The third in the new series about Cyriack Skinner Grey, modern scientific sleuth and EQMM's first wheelchair detective . . . about science vs. impossibility, and how Cyriack Skinner Grey solved a mystery simply by listening to the cold, unadorned facts . . .

THE SCIENTIST AND THE VANISHED WEAPON

by ARTHUR PORGES

LIEUTENANT TRASK'S FACE WAS gray and haggard, not so much from fatigue—he'd had only four hours' sleep in the last two days, which was no more than usual—as from frustration, grief, and rage.

"This is the season of miracles," he said in a bitter voice. "Christmas, Peace on Earth, Love Thy Neighbor, and all the rest. But I didn't expect a teen-age killer to pull a miracle. Drucker had a wife and four children," he added, "and this punk Remick shot three slugs into poor Drucker before Tom even knew what was happening. It didn't have to be like that; the punk could've got out the back door easily; Drucker was big and slow. Brave—too damned brave—but slow. I told him a million times to stop taking chances—to have his gun out and to use it, but not Tom—always afraid he'd shoot a frightened kid. Now," Trask grated, "one shot him—three times over. He might've lived—probably would've, Doc says—if Remick hadn't fired twice more."

Cyriack Skinner Grey, sitting quietly in the wheelchair in which he was destined to stay for the rest of his life, felt a surge of affection and sympathy for the tired detective. The police often suffered from a bad image in the public eye, but there were thousands of fine men like Trask who killed themselves by inches—when they didn't die violently at the hands of criminals—trying to make life safer for the people of their communities.

Grey took a shot-glass from a recess in one arm of the chair, held it under a tiny tap, and pressed a button. Amber liquid flowed out in a thin stream. He held the drink up for his friend.

"Can't," Trask said regretfully. "I'm still on duty."

The older man cocked his head, shrugged, and drank the whiskey himself.

"In that case," he said, "how about some coffee?"

From another faucet he quickly produced hot, black, and fragrant brew, drawing it into a small handleless cup of fine bone china.

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Trask shook his head in wonder, and accepted it.

"One of these days," he said, a little of the gloom leaving his face, "you'll haul a beautiful dancing girl out of that incredible contraption, and that's when I'll have myself tested for hallucinations!" He knew that Grey, formerly a top research scientist, who still had a fully equipped lab in this old house, had built a hundred gadgets into his wheelchair; yet the Lieutenant was surprised by a new one at least once a month. But it was because of the old man's flair for solving problems, first in the lab and now as a free-lance crime consultant, that Trask had come to see him.

"All right," Grey said, as the detective swallowed a third cupful. "Let's have it. What's all this about a miracle?"

"The miracle of the vanishing gun," Trask said. "I was licked at the scene, but I figured if anybody could counter a bad miracle with a good one, you're the man to do it."

He gave Grey the empty cup, and with hands clasped behind his back, paced the floor of the old man's study, speaking as he walked.

"It's like this. Tom Drucker caught the kid—Arnold Remick's his full name—inside Jack's Camera Exchange. The punk saw Tom first, and put three slugs into him; then he ran. Two of my men were in a cruiser not far away; they heard the shots and poured it on to get there. They spotted Remick going down an alley, and took after him. The punk hopped a fence, so they left the car to follow. The kid was running scared, I guess, because he ducked into a big apartment building and up the stairs. Fool thing to do really—no way out.

"Well, he sees an apartment with the door ajar, and slips in; but my two men, right behind, catch a glimpse, and know they have him boxed.

"The kid was kill-crazy; he fired right through the door until he ran out of shells. That's my guess, anyhow—we don't have the gun yet, which is why I'm here. When he stopped shooting; my men crashed into the place and handcuffed him—there was no more fight left in the punk.

"Naturally, they looked for the gun first thing, but it just wasn't there. The window was open, the way the door had been, and for the same reason. The woman who lives there had something cooking in the oven, so she wanted to air the rooms out. Meanwhile she went downstairs to chew the fat with another woman.

"Not finding the gun in the apartment, the men figure Remick tossed it out the window—what good that would do, I don't think he stopped to consider. He should've known we'd find it below soon enough. That's what *I* thought!" Trask added bitterly. "We combed that yard inch by inch, and every other area reachable from a third-floor window by a pro pitcher—nothing.

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"Now you tell me," Trask concluded, jaw out, looking squarely at Grey, "how a jerky kid with only seconds to spare can make a .38 automatic—that's what it was, judging from the bullets they dug out of poor Drucker—vanish. That's what I meant by a punk pulling a miracle."

"Gun not in the apartment—you're sure?"

"Absolutely. Nobody could hide something that big so quickly where we couldn't find it. We tore that place wide open. The tenant didn't like us one bit."

"Is the boy naturally clever or ingenious?"

"Just the opposite, damn it—that's what bugs me. He's a stupid drop-out punk of seventeen—can hardly put a sentence together, even in Basic English. And everything else he did that night shows stupidity—stupidity and hate. And another thing," the Lieutenant said in a thoughtful voice, "it just came to me. I think Remick expected us to find the gun. When my man came back empty-handed Remick looked sort of surprised. Now why was that, I wonder?"

"Tell me about the yard."

"Nothing to tell. Wouldn't be much of a sight even in summer—very little gardening done, I imagine. Right now, at this time of the year, it's just bare, except for the two grubby trees, the birdbath, and a barbecue covered with a plastic sheet. Oh, and a wooden table with built-on bench seats—you know the kind; like on a picnic ground."

"You checked them all, of course?"

"You bet. Found exactly nothing. Even took the plastic off the barbecue, although the gun obviously didn't go through it—no hole. And the birdbath was just solid ice inside. Without that gun," he said sourly, "we can't make a case, especially against a juvenile. The punk can claim he was just scared and running for fear of being accused. Sure, we can swear he fired from the room, and produce slugs similar to the ones that killed Tom, but you know juries and lawyers. They'll say: if this kid had a gun, where is it? Oh, you don't have it? Maybe it's just another cop frame-up—swearing away a boy's life because we let the real killer escape."

"What about the area beyond the yard?" Grey asked. He pressed a button; a humidor swung out and swiveled open. He took a thin, very black cigar from it, and the box disappeared with a snake-like glide.

Watching the scientist light the cheroot in a glowing disc set into one arm of the wheelchair, the detective said, "Same story. All pretty bare. Dry fishpond; some scrubby dead grass; a few beat-up shrubs—no place where a gun could disappear."

"Forgive me if I'm obvious," Grey said, smiling crookedly, "but couldn't somebody outside have

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simply picked it up and carried it away?"

"I thought of that. But the yard is completely fenced in, and it was dark out, remember. A person after the gun would need eyes like an owl, and he'd have to move like a scalded cat, besides. My man got down there pretty fast, after that quick first check of the apartment. We guarded the area all night, and searched again this morning—but no luck."

The scientist sat quietly in his chair, puffing on the cigar.

"I suppose," the detective said a little wistfully, "it's time to call in Edgar."

He meant Grey's puckish carrot-topped son, aged 14, who had an I.Q. of 180 and a genius for higher mathematics, especially topology. His father, who hated prigs, had made sure that Edgar developed both a sense of humor and a large bump of humility. As a widower and an intellectual, he knew the risk of raising his son single-handed but hoped—and planned—for the best. Edgar was the immobilized scientist's legs; he gathered data from which Grey extracted the key patterns that led to the solutions of his cases.

"No-o," Grey drawled. "I don't think that's necessary this time. If you've searched as carefully as you say, then sending Edgar to the scene wouldn't help. It seems to be a matter of pure reason at this point. Considering how quickly Remick must have acted, and assuming that your inference about his own surprise is valid, I can think of only one possible solution."

Trask was staring at him.

"Are you trying to tell me," he blurted, "that you already have it solved? That you know where the gun is?"

"I wouldn't be quite that dogmatic. But if your report was factual and complete, then my solution is at least highly probable. It was a cold night, I believe you said."

"That's right," the detective replied, almost absently. "Damp-cold, with some freezing slush on the ground. Which, by the way, as I should have told you, also indicated that nobody else picked up the gun from the yard and took it away—no fresh footprints except our own. Now," he begged, "for the love of Pete, what's the answer? Where is the gun?"

"I would say," the old man drawled with maddening deliberation, "that the gun is at the bottom of the birdbath, under the ice."

"Wha-a-t?" Trask exclaimed; then his face darkened, and he shook his head emphatically. "It can't be. This time, for once, you're wrong. Maybe it's my fault," he added quickly. "I didn't make the timing clear enough. After my men crashed the door, a fast once-over turned up nothing, so one of them ran down to the yard, while the other kept searching the apartment. Now, Ferber's a good cop; he checked the birdbath—remember this was less

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than ten minutes after Remick tossed out the gun, if he did. Well, there were six inches of solid ice in that birdbath—solid, as I said.

He gave Grey a weak, lopsided smile. "I'm an old pond-skater from Vermont; I know how water freezes. First, a crust forms at the top; then the ice moves down to the bottom. But it takes quite a while, even in cold weather. Last night it was maybe twenty-eight or so. That birdbath couldn't possibly freeze completely in the few minutes after the kid ditched the gun. And if it broke through the crust, Ferber would have found it—he jabbed the ice, and it was frozen solid right through to the bottom. Besides, the hole the gun would have made going through the crust would show up different, even if it glazed over fast."

"I take it the ice wasn't clear."

"No, dirty."

"So Ferber couldn't see down to the bottom," Grey said placidly.

"No, but—"

"All right," the old man interrupted him, beginning to show impatience. "I see the point you've tried to make. Only it's not necessarily valid in this case. If your search was thorough, the gun's not anywhere in the apartment or on the ground outside. Therefore it must be in the birdbath."

Grey raised one hand as Trask began to protest again. "Ever hear of supercooling? Last night the temperature dropped to below freezing—about twenty-eight, you suggested. Now, ordinarily, water begins to solidify at thirty-two, with very little leeway. But occasionally, when the temperature drop is gradual and the liquid remains undisturbed, it stays unfrozen even with a fall to several degrees below thirty-two. Then, if you toss a pebble, a twig—or a gun—into the supercooled water, it suddenly freezes solid, in a flash, all the way to the bottom.

"I think that's what happened last night. The boy got panicky and tossed the gun out of the window, not knowing how else to get rid of it fast. He *did* expect you to find it, which is why he looked so surprised at your failure. He couldn't guess that it would fall into the supercooled water of the birdbath, triggering it instantaneously to ice. As an old pond-skater," he jibed, "I'm surprised you never noticed the phenomenon before. Anyhow, you'd have found the gun after the first thaw."

Trask was wordless for a moment, then he said, "Not if somebody else—maybe a pal of Remick's tipped off to look around for what we missed—got there first." He wagged his head wonderingly. "Supercooled water—well, I'll be damned. The funny thing is," he said sheepishly, "that it comes back to me now. One night my dad actually showed us the stunt—made the whole pond on our farm freeze instantly by tossing in a stone. But I was only about nine, and didn't remember it till now.

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I'm almost afraid to check, in case you're wrong."

"If I am," Grey said, "then the boy is either a genuine miracle worker or your men are not very efficient. Why not go and find out," he suggested. "I'm rather curious myself."

"I'll just call Gaffney, who's watching the place," Trask said. "Then we'll know the truth in a hurry."

The answer came back by phone a few minutes later. The gun was there—a .38, and empty.

"It will match those slugs," the Lieutenant said, "so now we've got a case."

"Congratulations," the old man said in his driest voice. "And now I'll get back to my electronics."

He pressed a button. A motor hummed in the base of his wheelchair, and it rolled up a ramp toward the lab on the second floor. Trask watched for a moment, smiling, and then headed for the door. Suddenly the smile left his mouth. He still had to face Mrs. Drucker and Tom's four kids.

EDITORS' NOTE: The fourth case about Cyriack Skinner Grey is titled *The Scientist and the Obscene Crime*. It will appear in EQMM soon . . .

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"It is a perfectly fair straightforward problem," said Mr. Petherick—and, of course, Miss Jane Marple, the spinster-sleuth "who has her own way of looking at things," agreed fully with the little lawyer . .

MOTIVE VS. OPPORTUNITY

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

MR. PETHERICK CLEARED HIS throat rather more importantly than usual.

"I am afraid my little problem will seem rather tame to you all," he said apologetically, "after the sensational stories we have been hearing. There is no bloodshed in mine, but it seems to me an interesting and rather ingenious little problem, and fortunately I am in the position to know the right answer to it."

"It isn't terribly legal, is it?" asked Joyce Lemprière. "I mean points of law and lots of Barnaby versus Skinner in the year 1881, and things like that."

Mr. Petherick beamed appreciatively at her over his eyeglasses.

"No, no, my dear young lady. You need have no fears on that score. The story I am about to tell is a perfectly simple and straightforward one and can be followed by any layman."

"No legal quibbles, now," said Miss Marple, shaking a knitting needle at him.

"Certainly not," said Mr. Petherick.

"Ah, well, I am not so sure, but let's hear the story."

"It concerns a former client of mine. I will call him Mr. Clode—Simon Clode. He was a man of considerable wealth and lived in a large house not far from here. He had had one son killed in the War and this son had left one child, a little girl. Her mother had died at her birth, and on her father's death she had come to live with her grandfather who at once became passionately attached to her.

"Little Chris could do anything she liked with her grandfather. I have never seen a man more completely wrapped up in a child, and I cannot describe to you his grief and despair when, at the age of eleven, the child contracted pneumonia and died.

"Poor Simon Clode was inconsolable. A brother of his had recently died in poor circumstances and Simon Clode had generously offered a home to his brother's children—two girls, Grace and Mary, and a boy, George. But though kind and generous to his nephew and nieces, the old man never expended on

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them any of the love and devotion he had accorded to his little grandchild.

"Employment was found for George Clode in a bank nearby, and Grace married a clever young research chemist of the name of Philip Garrod. Mary, who was a quiet, self-contained girl, lived at home and looked after her uncle. She was, I think, fond of him in her quiet undemonstrative way.

"And to all appearances things went on very peacefully. I may say that after the death of little Christobel, Simon Clode came to me and instructed me to draw up a new will. By this will his fortune, a very considerable one, was divided equally among his nephew and nieces, one-third share to each.

"Time went on. Chancing to meet George Clode one day I inquired for his uncle, whom I had not seen for some time. To my surprise George's face clouded over. 'I wish you could put some sense into Uncle Simon,' he said ruefully. His honest but not very brilliant countenance looked puzzled and worried. 'This spirit business is getting worse and worse.'

" 'What spirit business?' I asked.

"Then George told me the whole story—how Mr. Clode had gradually got interested in the subject and how he had chanced to meet an American medium, a Mrs. Eurydice Spragg. This woman, whom George did not hesitate to characterize as an out-and-out swindler, had gained an immense ascendency over Simon Clode. She was practically always in the house and many séances were held in which the spirit of Christobel manifested itself to the doting grandfather.

"I may say here and now that I do not belong to the ranks of those who cover spiritualism with ridicule and scorn. I am, as I have told you, a believer in evidence. And I think that when we have an impartial mind and weigh the evidence in favor of spiritualism there remains much that cannot be put down to fraud or lightly set aside. Therefore, as I say, I am neither a believer nor an unbeliever.

"On the other hand, spiritualism lends itself very easily to fraud, and from all young George Clode told me about this Mrs. Eurydice Spragg I felt more and more convinced that Simon Clode was in bad hands and that Mrs. Spragg was probably an impostor of the worst type. The old man, shrewd as he was in practical matters, would be easily imposed on where his love for his dead grandchild was concerned.

"Turning things over in my mind, I felt more and more uneasy. I was fond of the young Clodes, Mary and George, and I realized that this Mrs. Spragg and her influence over their uncle might lead to trouble in the future.

"At the earliest opportunity I made a pretext for calling on Simon Clode. I found Mrs. Spragg installed

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as an honored and friendly guest. As soon as I saw her, my worst apprehensions were fulfilled. She was a stout woman of middle-age, dressed in a flamboyant style. Very full of cant phrases about 'Our dear ones who have passed over,' and things of that kind.

"Her husband was also staying in the house, Mr. Absalom Spragg, a thin lank man with a melancholy expression and extremely furtive eyes. As soon as I could, I got Simon Clode to myself and sounded him tactfully on the subject. He was full of enthusiasm. Eurydice Spragg was wonderful! She had been sent to him directly in answer to prayer! She cared nothing for money—the joy of helping a heart in affliction was enough for her. She had quite a mother's feeling for little Chris. He was beginning to regard her almost as a daughter.

"Then he went on to give me details—how he had heard his Chris's voice speaking—how she was well and happy with her father and mother. He went on to tell other sentiments expressed by the child, which in my remembrance of little Christobel seemed to me highly unlikely. She laid stress on the fact that 'Father and Mother loved dear Mrs. Spragg.'

" 'But, of course,' he broke off, 'you are a scoffer, Petherick.'

" 'No, I am not a scoffer. Very far from it. Some of the men who have written on the subject are men whose testimony I would accept unhesitatingly, and I should accord any medium recommended by them respect and credence. I presume that this Mrs. Spragg is well vouched for?'

"Simon went into ecstasies over Mrs. Spragg. She had been sent to him by Heaven. He had come across her at the watering place where he had spent two months in the summer. A chance meeting, with what a wonderful result!

"I went away very dissatisfied. My worst fears were realized, but I did not see what I could do. After a good deal of thought and deliberation I wrote to Philip Garrod who had, as I mentioned, just married the eldest Clode girl, Grace. I set the case before him—of course, in the most carefully guarded language.

"I pointed out the danger of such a woman gaining control of the old man's mind. And I suggested that Mr. Clode should be brought into contact if possible with some reputable spiritualistic circles. This, I thought, would not be a difficult matter for Philip Garrod to arrange.

"Garrod was prompt to act. He realized, which I did not, that Simon Clode's health was in a very precarious condition, and as a practical man he had no intention of letting his wife or her sister and brother be despoiled of the inheritance which was so rightly theirs. He came down the following week, bringing with him as a guest no other than the famous Professor Longman.

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"Professor Longman was a scientist of the first order, a man whose association with spiritualism compelled the latter to be treated with respect. Not only a brilliant scientist, he was a man of the utmost uprightness and probity.

"The result of the visit was most unfortunate. Longman, it seemed, had said very little while he was there. Two séances were held—under what conditions I do not know. Longman was noncommittal all the time he was in the house, but after his departure he wrote a letter to Philip Garrod.

"In it he admitted that he had not been able to detect Mrs. Spragg in fraud, nevertheless his private opinion was that the phenomena were not genuine. Mr. Garrod, he said, was at liberty to show this letter to his uncle if he thought fit, and he suggested that he himself should put Mr. Clode in touch with a medium of perfect integrity.

"Philip Garrod had taken this letter straight to his uncle, but the result was not what he had anticipated. The old man flew into a towering rage. It was all a plot to discredit Mrs. Spragg who was a maligned and injured saint! She had told him already what bitter jealousy there was of her in this country.

"He pointed out that Longman was forced to say he had not detected fraud. Eurydice Spragg had come to him in the darkest hour of his life, had given him help and comfort, and he was prepared to espouse her cause even if it meant quarreling with every member of his family. She meant more to him than anyone else in the world.

"Philip Garrod was turned out of the house with scant ceremony; but as a result of his rage Clode's own health took a decided turn for the worse. For the last month he had kept to his bed pretty continuously, and now there seemed every possibility of his being a bedridden invalid until such time as death should release him.

"Two days after Philip's departure I received an urgent summons and went hurriedly over. Clode was in bed and looked even to my layman's eye very ill indeed. He was gasping for breath.

" 'This is the end of me,' he said. 'I feel it. Don't argue with me, Petherick. But before I die I am going to do my duty by the one human being who has done more for me than anyone else in the world. I want to make a new will.'

" 'Certainly,' I said, 'if you will give me your instructions now, I will draft out a will and send it to you.'

" 'That won't do,' he said. 'Why, man, I might not live through the night. I have written out what I want here,' he fumbled under his pillow, 'and you can tell me if it is right.'

"He produced a sheet of paper with a few words roughly scribbled on it in pencil. It was quite simple

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and clear. He left £5000 to each of his nieces and nephew, and the residue of his vast property outright to Eurydice Spragg 'in gratitude and admiration.'

"I didn't like it, but there it was. There was no question of unsound mind—the old man was as sane as anybody.

"He rang the bell for two of the servants. They came promptly. The housemaid, Emma Gant, was a tall middle-aged woman who had been in service there for many years and who had nursed Clode devotedly. With her came the cook, a fresh buxom young woman of thirty. Simon Clode glared at them both from under his bushy eyebrows.

" 'I want you to witness my will. Emma, get me my fountain pen.'

"Emma went over obediently to the desk.

" 'Not that left-hand drawer, girl,' said old Simon irritably. 'Don't you know it is in the right-hand one?'

" 'No, it is here, sir,' said Emma, producing it.

" 'Then you must have put it away wrong last time,' grumbled the old man. 'I can't stand things not being kept in their proper places.'

"Still grumbling, he took the pen from her and copied his own rough draft, amended by me, onto a fresh piece of paper. Then he signed his name, Emma Gant and the cook, Lucy David, also signed. I folded the will up and put it into a long blue envelope. It was necessarily, you understand, written on an ordinary piece of paper.

"Just as the servants were turning to leave the room Clode lay back on the pillows with a gasp and a distorted face. I bent over him anxiously and Emma Gant came quickly back. However, the old man recovered and smiled weakly.

" 'It is all right, Petherick, don't be alarmed. At any rate I shall die easy now, having done what I wanted to.'

"Emma Gant looked inquiringly at me as if to know whether she could leave the room. I nodded reassuringly and she went out—first stopping to pick up the blue envelope which I had let slip to the floor in my moment of anxiety. She handed it to me and I slipped it into my coat pocket and then she went out.

" 'You are annoyed, Petherick,' said Simon Clode. 'You are prejudiced, like everybody else.'

" 'It is not a question of prejudice,' I said. 'Mrs. Spragg may be all that she claims to be. I should see no objection to you leaving her a small legacy as a memento of gratitude; but I tell you frankly, Clode, that to disinherit your own flesh and blood in favor of a stranger is wrong.'

"With that I turned to depart. I had done what I could and made my protest.

"Mary Clode came out of the drawing room and met me in the hall.

" 'You will have tea before you

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go, won't you? Come in here,' and she led me into the drawing room.

"A fire was burning on the hearth and the room looked cosy and cheerful. She took my overcoat just as her brother, George, came into the room. He took it from her and laid it across a chair at the far end of the room, then he came back to the fireside where we drank tea.

"During the meal a question arose about some point concerning the estate. Simon Clode had said he didn't want to be bothered with it and had left it to George to decide. George was rather nervous about trusting to his own judgment. At my suggestion, we adjourned to the study after tea and I looked over the papers in question. Mary Clode accompanied us.

"A quarter of an hour later I prepared to take my departure. Remembering that I had left my overcoat in the drawing room, I went there to fetch it. The only occupant of the room was Mrs. Spragg, who was kneeling by the chair on which the overcoat lay. She seemed to be doing something rather unnecessary to the cretonne slip cover. She rose with a very red face as we entered.

" 'That slip cover never did sit right,' she complained. 'I could make a better fit myself.'

"I took up my overcoat and put it on. As I did so, I noticed that the envelope containing the will had fallen out of the pocket and was lying on the floor. I replaced it in my pocket, said goodbye, and took my departure.

"On arrival at my office I removed my overcoat and took the will from the pocket. I had it in my hand and was standing by the table when my clerk came in. Somebody wished to speak to me on the telephone, and the extension to my desk was out of order. I accordingly accompanied him to the outer office and remained there for about five minutes engaged in conversation over the telephone.

"When I emerged, I found my clerk waiting for me.

" 'Mr. Spragg has called to see you, sir. I showed him into your office.'

"I went there to find Mr. Spragg sitting by the table. He rose and greeted me in a somewhat unctuous manner, then proceeded to a long discursive speech. In the main it seemed to be an uneasy justification of himself and his wife. He was afraid people were saying, and so on. His wife had been known from her babyhood upwards for the pureness of her heart and her motives.

"I was, I am afraid, rather curt with him. In the end I think he realized that his visit was not being a success and he left somewhat abruptly. I then remembered that I had left the will lying on the table. I took it, sealed the envelope, wrote on it, and put it away in the safe.

"Now I come to the crux of my story. Two months later Simon Clode died. I will not go into long-

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winded discussions, I will just state the bare facts. *When the sealed envelope containing the will was opened it was found to contain a sheet of blank paper.*"

He paused, looking round the circle of interested faces.

"You appreciate the point, of course? For two months the sealed envelope had lain in my safe. It could not have been tampered with then. No, the time limit was a very short one—between the moment the will was signed and my locking it away in the safe. Now who had had the opportunity, and to whose interests would it be to do so?

"I will recapitulate the vital points in a brief summary: the will was signed by Mr. Clode, placed by me in an envelope—so far so good. It was then put by me in my overcoat pocket. That overcoat was taken from me by Mary and handed by her to George, who was in full sight of me while handling the coat.

"During the time that I was in the study, Mrs. Eurydice Spragg would have had plenty of time to extract the envelope from the coat pocket, read its contents, and my finding the envelope on the floor and not in the pocket seemed to point to her having done so. But here we come to a curious point: she had the *opportunity* of substituting the blank paper, but no *motive*. The will was in her favor, and by substituting a blank piece of paper she lost the inheritance she had been so anxious to gain.

"The same applies to Mr. Spragg. He, too, had the opportunity. He was left alone with the document in question for some two or three minutes in my office. But again, it was not to his advantage. So we are faced with this curious problem: the two people who had the *opportunity* of substituting a blank piece of paper had no *motive*, and the two people who had a *motive* had no *opportunity*.

"By the way, I would not exclude the housemaid, Emma Gant, from suspicion. She was devoted to her young master and mistress and detested the Spraggs. She would, I feel sure, have been quite equal to attempting the substitution if she had thought of it. But although she actually handled the envelope when she picked it up from the floor and handed it to me, she certainly had no opportunity of tampering with its contents and she could not have substituted another envelope by some sleight of hand, because the envelope in question was brought into the house by me and no one there would be likely to have a duplicate.

"Now, there is my little problem. I have, I hope, stated it clearly. I should be interested to hear your views."

To everyone's astonishment Miss Marple gave vent to a long and prolonged chuckle. Something seemed to be amusing her immensely.

"What *is* the matter, Aunt Jane?

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Can't we share the joke?" said Raymond.

"I was thinking of little Tommy Symonds, a naughty little boy, I am afraid, but sometimes very amusing. One of those children with innocent childlike faces who are always up to some mischief or other. I was thinking how last week in Sunday school he said, 'Teacher, do you say yolk of eggs *is* white or yolk of eggs *are* white?' And Miss Durston explained that anyone would say 'yolks of eggs *are* white, or yolk of egg *is* white'—and naughty Tommy said, 'Well, I should say yolk of egg is yellow!' Very naughty of him, of course, and as old as the hills. I knew that one as a child."

"Very funny, my dear Aunt Jane," Raymond said gently, "but surely that has nothing to do with the interesting story Mr. Petherick has been telling us."

"Oh, yes, it has," said Miss Marple. "It is a catch! And so is Mr. Petherick's story a catch. So like a lawyer! Ah, my dear old friend!" She shook a reproving head at him.

"I wonder if you really know," said the lawyer with a twinkle.

Miss Marple wrote a few words on a piece of paper, folded it up, and passed it across to him.

Mr. Petherick unfolded the paper, read what was written on it, and looked across at her appreciatively.

"My dear friend," he said, "is there anything you do not know?"

"I knew that as a child," said Miss Marple. "Played with it too."

"I feel rather out of this," said Sir Henry. "I feel sure that Mr. Petherick has some clever legal legerdemain up his sleeve."

"Not at all," said Mr. Petherick. "It is a perfectly fair straightforward problem. You must not pay any attention to Miss Marple. She has her own way of looking at things."

"We *should* be able to arrive at the truth," said Raymond West vexedly. "The facts certainly seem plain enough. Five persons actually touched that envelope. The Spraggs clearly could have meddled with it, but equally clearly they did not do so. There remains the other three. Now, when one sees the marvelous ways that conjurers have of doing a thing before one's eyes, it seems to me that paper could have been extracted and another substituted by George Clode during the time he was carrying the overcoat to the far end of the room."

"Well, *I* think it was the girl," said Joyce. "I think the housemaid ran down and told her what was happening and she got hold of another blue envelope and just substituted the one for the other."

Sir Henry shook his head. "I disagree with you both," he said. "These things are done by conjurers, and they are done on the stage and in novels, but I think they would be impossible to do in real life, especially under the shrewd eyes of a man like my friend Mr.

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Petherick here. But I have an idea—it is only an idea and nothing more.

"We know that Professor Longman had just been down for a visit and that he said very little. It is only reasonable to suppose that the Spraggs may have been very anxious as to the result of that visit. If Simon Clode did not take them into his confidence, which is quite probable, they may have viewed his sending for Mr. Petherick from quite another angle. They may have believed that Mr. Clode had already made a will which benefitted Eurydice Spragg and that this new one might be made for the express purpose of cutting her out as a result of Professor Longman's revelations.

"In that case, suppose Mrs. Spragg prepared to effect a substitution. This she does, but with Mr. Petherick coming in at an unfortunate moment, she has no time to read the real document and hastily destroys it by fire in case the lawyer should discover his loss."

Joyce shook her head very decidedly.

"She would never burn it without reading it."

"The solution is rather a weak one," admitted Sir Henry. "I suppose—er—Mr. Petherick did not assist Providence himself."

The little lawyer drew himself up in offended dignity.

"A most improper suggestion," he said with some asperity.

"What does Dr. Pender say?" asked Sir Henry.

"I cannot say I have any very clear ideas. I think the substitution must have been effected by either Mrs. Spragg or her husband, possibly for the motive that Sir Henry suggests. If she did not read the will until after Mr. Petherick had departed, she would then be in somewhat of a dilemma, since she could not own up to her action in the matter. Possibly she would place it among Mr. Clode's papers where she thought it would be found after his death. But why it wasn't found I don't know. It *might* be a mere speculation this—that Emma Gant came across it and out of misplaced devotion to her employers deliberately destroyed it."

"I think Dr. Pender's solution is the best of all," said Joyce. "Is it right, Mr. Petherick?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"I will go on where I left off. I was dumfounded and quite as much at sea as you are. I don't think I should ever have guessed the truth—probably not—but I was enlightened. It was cleverly done too.

"I went and dined with Philip Garrod about a month later, and in the course of our after-dinner conversation he mentioned an interesting case that had recently come to his notice.

" 'I should like to tell you about it, Petherick, in confidence, of course.'

" 'Quite so,' I replied.

" 'A friend of mine who had ex-

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pectations from one of his relatives was greatly distressed to find that that relative had thoughts of benefiting a totally unworthy person. My friend, I am afraid, is a trifle unscrupulous in his methods. There was a maid in the house who was greatly devoted to the interests of what I may call the legitimate party.

"'My friend gave her very simple instructions. He gave her a fountain pen, duly filled. She was to place this in a drawer in the writing table in her master's room, but not the usual drawer where the pen was generally kept. If her master asked her to witness his signature to any document and asked her to bring him his pen, she was to bring him not the right one, but this one which was an exact duplicate of it. That was all she had to do. He gave her no other information.

"'She was a devoted creature and she carried out his instructions faithfully.'

"Philip Garrod broke off and said, "'I hope I am not boring you, Petherick.'

"'Not at all,' I said. 'I am keenly interested.'

"Our eyes met.

"'My friend is, of course, not known to you,' he said.

"'Of course not,' I replied.

"'Then that is all right,' said Philip Garrod.

"He paused, then said smilingly, 'You see the point? The pen was filled with what is commonly known as Evanescent Ink—a solution of starch in water to which a few drops of iodine have been added. This makes a blue-black fluid, but the writing disappears entirely in four or five days.'"

Miss Marple chuckled. "Disappearing ink. Many is the time I played with it as a child. And that is the answer I wrote on the piece of paper I handed to Mr. Petherick. But all the same it's a catch," she said. "Just like a lawyer."

Mr. Petherick nodded and beamed.

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Henry T. Parry's "first story" was called "Winter Savory," and it appeared in the June 1965 issue of EQMM. Here is Mr. Parry's second story, and if his first showed promise, this second shows tremendous promise.

"A Place of Sacrifice" is a "lovely little tale"—impressively written, authentic in background, and with that curiously satisfying quality—gem-like—that certain rare stories have for readers with a special feeling for far-off places . . .

We look forward eagerly to Mr. Parry's next story . . .

A PLACE OF SACRIFICE

by HENRY T. PARRY

"—and thence to a place of execution . . . ."

John Farthing wondered if the ancient Greek magistrates had used these words when they passed sentence. And did the condemned know the nature of that place? Those who had made the pilgrimage or had attended the games there would know, of course, and would remember the gray-white cliffs of the Phedriades riding over the brooding valley at Delphi.

Hurling the condemned from the cliffs, Farthing thought, had at least the Greek virtue of directness, without the catlike cruelty that had prevailed before and since.

Farthing had never seen the Phedriades, but 40 years of teaching the classics had made them as familiar as if he had. In two hours the bus would arrive at Delphi, which was once the center of the world. He would realize his life-long dream —to see and experience those places that civilized men, wrongly perhaps, and with overmuch nostalgia surely, revere as no other places have been revered since.

That he could barely afford the trip only added to its zest. His salary at Boothbay College had been scanty, even for a New England school, and his pension was proportionately modest. When the Boston Museum offered a charter flight to Athens, a bus tour of the ancient sites, and a short cruise among the Greek islands—all at such a low price as to seem a bargain even for one in Farthing's straitened condition—he drew out a large fraction of his savings and signed up. Most of the party were museum members, scholarly in interest if not in occupation; they shared a love for all things Greek and a deep interest in archeology.

In Athens the group was joined by a half dozen others, including the star of the tour, Dr. Gamache,

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the great French archeologist. Tall, with a pugnacious black beard and sharp black eyes that were challengingly alert, he was a man who suffered fools not at all. The tourists held him in awe not only because of his world-wide reputation—he had written two books on Delphi alone—but because of his dignity and aloofness. Added to this was his legendary reputation as a hero of the French Resistance.

Ten miles north of Livadia the bus halted on one of the innumerable switchbacks in the mountain road. A road crew was pushing large rocks from the surface of the road, and gingerly approaching the edge, rolling them down the steep sides of the ravine.

"Last night's earthquake—and as you know they are frequent in this country," the tour director announced after talking to the workmen. "The tremor has shaken loose rocks onto the road. It is littered with them for the next few miles where the road lies close to the wall of the mountain. We will be here for quite a while, so if you want to get out and take pictures please do so. That mountain farthest off to the northwest is Parnassus."

In the obedient manner of tourists they filed out of the bus. Dr. Gamache trained his binoculars on the mountains.

"Ah, Parnasse," he murmured to himself, and almost absently he passed his glasses to Farthing. The power of the binoculars and the clarity of the Greek light made the details of rock, bush, and criss-cross donkey trails leap out from the adjacent hillsides. Far to the north, too distant even for Dr. Gamache's glasses, the gray heads of the Phedriades loomed over the cleft of the Pleistos Valley. Farthing handed the glasses back to the Frenchman.

"Thank you. They are splendid binoculars. May I ask where you bought them?"

"I did not exactly buy them. I acquired them, you might say, from an unwelcome visitor to my country some years back. He appeared to need them no longer. But they were not cheap."

When he got back into the bus, Farthing received his first indication that the easy-going camaraderie that marks groups of Americans traveling abroad was about to be tested. His seat was taken. Now, it is the unwritten rule for parties traveling by chartered bus that the seat one takes on first entering the bus remains his seat for the remainder of the journey.

In the seat next to Farthing's was its original occupant, a young man—a high school teacher from Wellesley, Mass.—who now regarded Farthing's situation with sympathy. Farthing's seat was filled by a large fair-haired woman who gave the impression of being dressed in colored scarves. Through Farthing's mind shot a picture of a corner gas station hung with metallic pennants that writhed in the wind.

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Feeling conspicuous and somehow at fault, Farthing scanned the bus for an empty seat.

"Now if this is your seat," the trespasser said in a Southwestern accent, "I hope you don't mind—" she pronounced it "mand"—"if I just sit here although I see no reason why a person who has paid for a seat can't sit anywhere they want to. This young—" her hesitation revealed her appraisal— "fellow here—" the young man sat in embarrassed neutrality— "said the seat was occupied but I told him that if this was Callas, Texas, any gentleman would be glad to swap seats with a lady."

"Well, uh, yes, of course," Farthing mumbled.

The high school teacher collected his camera and flight bag and said, "Here, sir, please take my seat. I'll find something in the back."

Before Farthing could protest the young man was gone. As had happened so many times in his life, Farthing found himself outschemed. He sat down and the character of his trip changed.

"Name's Farthing. From Boothbay, Maine," he muttered.

The florid lady considered his name for a moment, as though running it through a file of important names, and then dismissed it, as seemingly of no consequence.

"I'm Mrs. Clara Corlear of Callas, Texas. My husband, Parmenter—poor man, he passed on five years ago—was one of the Corlears of Callas. Oil and real estate, you know. Oh, we did have a little ranch up country, not more than thirty-five hundred acres, not much. When Parmenter made me his bride I was a Kromhead of Ogallalla Springs. Do you really like Greece? I couldn't stand Athens. I was staying in the best hotel there and in the finest suite that they had which isn't saying much in this part of the world. I joined up on this tour in Athens to get away from there and to be with Americans for a change. There's nothing like your own people I always say. The Greeks are so standoffish and proud. They act like they weren't poor. At that I like them better than I like the French."

Farthing cringed inwardly at what he knew was coming as Mrs. Corlear continued, her voice rising easily over the engine noise with the plangent quality of a twanged nail file.

"I spent all spring in France and I must say that when it comes to cheating and robbing the tourists the French are the worst of the lot. They overcharge you. They short-change you. They're rude, ill-tempered, and money-grubbing. It's a dirty country inhabited by a dirty lot of—"

"Mr. Farthing," came an urgent whisper from across the aisle, "tell her that Dr. Gamache will hear."

It was impossible for Dr. Gamache not to have heard, but he continued to stare ahead, his beard jutting out like that of a figure in a frieze.

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Collective embarrassment pervaded the group. Dr. Gamache was with them only for the Delphi trip; he had accepted the lecture offer as a gesture of friendship to the museum. For a man of his eminence to have his own people gratuitously insulted, and before a group who held him in esteem, was unthinkable.

To Farthing the incident was unforgivable. He had the quality, common in generous people, of being more disturbed over an injury to someone he admired than to himself.

The cautionary whisper no longer applied. Mrs. Corlear had altered the pitch of her conversational propellers and was cruising easily on another subject.

"—must be concerned with what other people think, I told her, and I told her this a dozen times—" Farthing agreed grimly "—but there are times when one must consider the proprieties and it did not seem to me that, considering the social position of the rest of us, we should welcome or accept a young divorced woman, especially a divorcee whose husband had started the proceedings against her which doesn't place her in any favorable light and I can see where a lot of others must have agreed with me in my efforts to shut her out because shortly after that she left town and the last I heard of her she was working in Miami Beach, probably no better than—".

He felt caught in the stream of her words as an escapee is pinned by penitentiary searchlights or as a rioter is impaled by the high-pressure stream of the fire hose. As a young man, Farthing had once descended to the turbine level in the wall of a power dam and had stood in awe by the small iron door beyond which the impounded water threshed at the turbine fins. He felt now as he had then—that he was in the presence of an unlimited natural force.

"—is what these wogs here call an earthquake they can count themselves fortunate. Compared to what Parmenter and I saw when we visited—"

Farthing thought of the great quakes of the late forties in Greece when entire cliffs, like slices of overrich cake, had split off and dissolved into the sea, and of the great quake of 373 B.C. which had destroyed the temple of Apollo at Delphi.

"Madam, please shut up. I have taught and read and loved the classics for forty years and have waited through every one of those forty years until I could come to Greece. For me, and for the others on this tour, this is the realization of all our reading and dreaming. Look at us. We are teachers, students, retired people—all lovers of the Golden Age who have saved and scraped and denied ourselves to make this journey. Do not spoil it for us with your ignorance, selfishness, and atrociously bad manners. And please,

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please stop talking—if only for a little while."

Naturally he said nothing of the kind. Rather, he steeled himself to bear the remorseless flow of words as the bus cautiously negotiated the steep mountain roads. It is better to endure than to injure, he told himself. Who was he to judge the needs of another?

Perhaps Mrs. Corlear was a long-time expatriate seeking companionship among her own people, escaping from the loneliness of hotel rooms and the smiling greed of hotel help. Nor was it likely that any words of his would alter her habits of a lifetime.

Nevertheless his heart sank as he looked ahead to the trips to Mycenae, Sunion, and Olympus, when each day he would be sealed into the metal container of the bus, elbow to elbow with a compulsive talker. And after that, the lion-colored islands . . .

When the bus pulled up the long grade into the village of Delphi, Farthing, from his years of poring over the photographs, recognized the sacred precincts. The Phedriades did not so much dominate Delphi as they soared above it.

He identified the jutting ledges, about a third of the way up, from which he had long ago planned to see the sun rise over the center of the world. At the foot of the cliffs ran the jewel-clear Castalian spring, the delight of tourists for 2000 years. The climb to the shouldering ledges would be taxing for an elderly man, but not impossible—a business of clambering from rock to rock with assists from the stunted undergrowth that clung to the face of the bluffs.

In his dreams, when the March night streamed down his Maine windows, he saw himself emerging from the tangle of boulders to the rocky shelf to gaze across the ruined marbles in the sanctuary to where the Aegean thrust a blue arm into the olive groves. He would see the sunlight fill the deep cleft and creep across the sacred plain, and in the silence and brightness he would see Delphi as countless Greeks had seen it—as the center of the world, the shining unanswerable mystery of being Man. I will emerge from a wilderness of rock, he thought, and stand at the edge in the luminous air while below me and above me soar the eagles of Zeus . . .

After lunch at the hotel they assembled to hear Dr. Gamache's talk in the ruins of the temple of Apollo, at the precise spot where the prophetess had given her ambiguous answers. The group sat silent and respectful, with the deference that knowing amateurs pay to the professional.

Farthing's bad luck was still holding. Mrs. Corlear sat down beside him.

Dr. Gamache began by describing the dig he had worked on.

"How old were you when you worked here," interrupted Mrs.

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Corlear, "and tell us all about the Greek fillies."

"How can it matter?" replied Dr. Gamache curtly. "The village," he went on, "once stood on the site of the shrine and had to be moved to where you now see it."

"I guess it's not just the ladies who are sensitive about their age, eh, girls," she said in a clearly audible aside. The group shifted uneasily, fearful that Mrs. Corlear's sure sense of impropriety—calling the women of this group "girls"—would turn a scholarly lecture into a backyard barbecue.

Dr. Gamache began again but before he had spoken three sentences Mrs. Corlear commented to Farthing in tones loud enough for them all to hear. "I hope the old bore hurries it up. I want to start giving those gift shops up in the village a working-over."

Dr. Gamache stopped in the middle of a sentence, stared at the ground at his feet for a full minute, then calmly shoved his books into his bag, much as if he had concluded an hour's lecture and a routine question period.

"You will forgive me," he said. "I think you will agree that under the circumstances it would not be rewarding to proceed. If you wish I shall be glad to list several books for you. Adieu."

The tourists sat in embarrassed silence as Dr. Gamache stalked away across the temple floor; then they scattered in small groups over the site, ashamed and furious. Mrs. Corlear appeared unaware that her conduct had broken up the lecture.

"Wish me luck," she said to Farthing, "I'm off to the wars."

Farthing had never expected in this life to be grateful for the existence of a gift shop.

That evening Farthing came up from his room—all the hotel rooms in Delphi were below street level since the hotel clung to the steep slope of the valley—and was shown to a small dining table on the balcony.

A thousand feet below, the olive groves of the Pleistos Valley were indistinct in the gathering dusk while across and above the valley the mountain wall was bright in the sunset. At the valley's mouth the sea lay dark and still.

He ordered a bottle of Achaia Domestica, unresinated, and sat there building a minor sunset within himself. Dionysius, he reflected, was the reigning god of Delphi in the absence of Apollo.

"Oh, there you are, Mr.—er—" boomed Mrs. Corlear as she strode across the balcony to his table, her draperies fluttering. Farthing had the feeling that Sir Richard Grenville must have had when the 53 galleons closed in on his *Revenge*. "Do you mind?"

Without waiting for Farthing's reply she was about to seat herself in the chair he had hurriedly drawn out for her when she moved swiftly

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to the other side of the table and sat down in Farthing's chair.

"You have been selfishly looking at the sunset long enough and it's time you shared the view with someone else."

Numbly, Farthing murmured some trifle and sat down on the other side of the table, facing eastward toward the brooding shadows of the valley. Suitable, suitable, he thought; the sunset is ruined anyway. Incredible that a brassy mortal could destroy the beauty of the Greek twilight. He poured the golden wine into her glass, refilled his own, and looked up.

"—something Parmenter once said about sunsets reminding him of dying which was unusual for him because he wasn't one of your broody types at all although at the end I thought he was quite brave almost as though he didn't mind going. Oh, boy," she addressed the gray-haired waiter without breaking verbal stride, "I just must have some of that mouzakis and some of that what-do-you-call-it souvlakia and be sure to save me a piece of that delicious honey-and-nut pastry—better make it two pieces and maybe your tip might be just a little bigger than otherwise. I used to warn Parmenter about these foreign waiters—"

Farthing appeared to be listening, but in his mind he and Mrs. Corlear were riding alone in the tour bus and each word she spoke changed into a fragment of confetti and swirled about the floor of the vehicle. When the words washed knee-high he drew his feet up on the seat which was drifting over. He stood on the seat, crouching under the baggage rack, as the paper tide of words reached his throat, his mouth, and finally his nose. He went down in a smothering whiteness of words . . .

Three hours later, when the lights had been switched off and on as a hint that the restaurant was about to close, Farthing freed himself after a detailed account of the inadequacies of Mrs. Corlear's daughter-in-law and the ingratitude of her son. With uncharacteristic cunning he told her that he planned to spend the next morning looking for a present for his niece. On the remainder of the trip, he told himself, he would have to take his chances of being trapped by Mrs. Corlear, but tomorrow nothing must interfere with his seeing Delphi at sunrise.

The sun was clearing the hills the next morning when Farthing emerged panting from the chimney-like channel he had climbed to reach the jutting ledges that he had fixed as his vantage point. Below him lay the hallowed precincts – theater, temple, and tholos, one below the other to the very edge of the gorge.

Across the deep valley of the Pleistos, the mountain that counterbalanced Parnassus was surfacing into the light. Far below him and above, the hawks (the eagles of

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Zeus at last?) wheeled in easy arcs. The valley, the mountains, the ancient columns, and the distant sea were fixed in brilliance and mystery.

He picked his way carefully to the edge of the sloping shoulder, avoiding the smaller rocks that might slide under his weight, slipping on the rubble that rolled from under his feet to disappear over the edge. A shallow, coffin-sized slab of rock, which reminded Farthing of the lid of a sarcophagus, lay slanted across the shoulder, fresh earth clinging to its sides. Above it on the steep slope lay a long depression in the earth, showing where it had been dislodged to lie on the loose gravel of the shoulder.

There had been no frost or rainfall for months and the rock was far too large to have been idly kicked loose even in the unlikely event that a tourist had climbed to this rarely visited perch. Of course, he thought, the same earthquake that shook the rocks onto the roads must have dislodged this.

He stepped upon it to cross over and leaped back with a start. The slab slid toward the edge, coasting on the loose gravel. Tentatively he pushed against it with one foot and again the rock slid ponderously forward, stopping three feet from the edge of the gorge.

Farthing decided that it would be wise not to interfere further, to leave it balanced shakily on the rubble awaiting the next impulse—rain wash, ice, rock slide, earthquake—today, tomorrow, or a thousand years from now—that would send it careening down the steep, gravel-strewn shelf like a stone toboggan, to disappear over the edge and take its place 300 feet below among the detritus that clustered about the foot of the Phedriades.

He climbed around the uphill end of the rock, carefully let himself down the slope again, and stood at the edge, looking down. If this were the precise spot from which the Greeks cast those condemned to die, he thought, it was nearly as dangerous for the executioners as for their prisoners. But the condemneds' last sight of the world would at least be the most magnificent they had seen in their earthly lives.

The legend of Cleobis and Biton came to his mind—the two brothers who had pulled the wagon of their priestess-mother to Delphi and who had been rewarded by the goddess Hera with the gift of death. Other fragments of years of reading came back to him: here was the seat of the early United Nations when the city states met, sitting as the Amphyctionic League; Pausanias, that early travel writer, wrote of Delphi that—

"Oh, you selfish man," Mrs. Corlear bugled, "sitting up here all by yourself enjoying the sunrise. I saw you start off down the road and I said to myself that that poor Mr. Shilling was all by himself and

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would certainly enjoy having someone to talk to."

She appeared out of the scrub and rock and made her way, one step at a time, across the slope. As she approached the loose slab, Farthing opened his mouth to caution her; but he could only think that his day at Delphi was to be spoiled and of the long tour that still lay ahead of them—Olympus, Mycenae, Sunion, the tawny islands. These gentle people who had come so far to see what they had loved for so long would have their trip ruined by a withering stream of words.

Fascinated, horrified by what he found within himself, Farthing watched her approach the treacherously poised rock, step by careful step.

There were four steps remaining. Then three. Then two. Now one.

To refrain from doing right is to do wrong, he thought, but nevertheless on my head be it. The words of warning died in his throat; he turned his back and did not see her step up on the slab and only heard the swift clatter as the rock coasted down across the shale to plunge over the edge.

Even as she was swept over, Farthing heard her say, "—Parmenter had no head for heights but it has never bothered—"

Delphi resumed the sunlit silence of centuries.

The next afternoon Farthing waited his turn to board the bus for the return trip to Athens. The Greek police had, with casual efficiency, closed out the case as an accident and permitted the party to leave. As Farthing waited, Dr. Gamache approached him, and much to Farthing's surprise, the archeologist shook his hand with sympathy.

"Remember in the years to come," he said, "when you look back on what has happened here, remember that you are not alone. There are many good and upright men in this world who have done that which they otherwise would not have chosen to do, have acted without evil or selfish motivation. But the guilt of having done a terrible deed for a higher purpose is still guilt and must always, as you will learn, be borne by the doer. You must learn then, as I have, to regard the bearing of this burden as your personal sacrifice for the good of others."

Farthing understood immediately, but he was determined to reject any implication of guilt. He was about to remonstrate when Dr. Gamache continued, "Yesterday morning shortly after sunrise, I was scanning the Phedriades with these"—he tapped his binoculars—"and I saw you slide that slab with a mere shove of your foot before that—that lady—appeared. You made no movement to halt her as she approached the rock, and as she set foot on it you turned your back. Why? Because you knew something was about to happen that you would prefer not to see. But it is closed,

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my friend, and we all agree it was a tragic accident."

"Yes, yes, most unfortunate," mumbled Farthing.

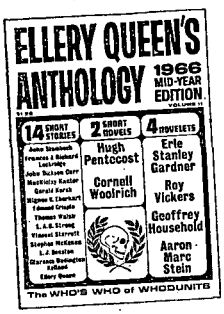
They climbed into the bus and sat down together. Dr. Gamache commenting as they did so. "I assure you, my friend, that I shall not violate this well-earned silence."

A half mile from the hotel the bus pulled over and stopped.

"If anyone should wish a last look at the Phedriades you can get a good one from here," announced the tour director.

As Dr. Gamache and Farthing gazed upward at the ledge where yesterday's events occurred, Farthing said, "The words that some judges used in pronouncing sentence stay in my mind: 'and thence to a place of execution.' Now that I have seen Delphi it is difficult to think of it in those terms."

"It is indeed," said Dr. Gamache. "Consider it rather as a place of sacrifice. And of justice."



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THE CLUE OF THE HUNGRY HORSE

by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

(*continued from page 48*)

NEXT MORNING THE ROCKVILLE *Gazette* was on the streets with an extra.

"MURDER," SCREAMS THE SHERIFF
"PUBLICITY," SNAPS D. A.
"POPPYCOCK," SNORTS CALHOUN

The article which followed showed Edward Lyons, the publisher and managing editor, at his sarcastic best.

"When the body of an unidentified young woman was found in the stable of Carl Carver Calhoun, wealthy broker who has established a country home at Rockville, Sheriff Bill Eldon, with a nose for publicity at least as sharp as his nose for clues, promptly announced that the victim was Lorraine Calhoun, daughter of the broker. The woman had evidently been kicked by a mare.

"Only after Calhoun and a business associate had driven at breakneck speed to Rockville, and announced that the victim was not only no relation to Mr. Calhoun but a perfect stranger, did the Sheriff reluctantly shift his position. Then, with the aid of a tape measure and some of his 'brilliant' deductive reasoning, he arrived at the conclusion that he was dealing with a murder.

"Because of a three-quarter-inch discrepancy between the size of the shoe on the mare and the imprint of the shoe on the forehead of the victim, Sheriff Eldon lost no time announcing his theory of foul play.

"Regardless of the motive which prompted this action on his part, the result has been all that any publicity-crazed politician could ask for. When word reached the newsrooms of the city papers that an unidentified girl had been murdered in the stable of the wealthy broker, reporters and photographers descended upon Rockville in a flood.

"Rush Medford, the District Attorney, brands the Sheriff's charge as 'premature to say the least. It is,' Medford asserts, 'the result of synthetic clues which have been conjured up in the imagination of a man who received some publicity in the metropolitan papers a year or so ago and found the experience pleasant.'

"The District Attorney apparently was referring to the murder committed on the old Higbee place last year, a crime in which luck played into Sheriff Eldon's hands, but which netted him some very flattering publicity.

"Doubtless District Attorney

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Medford is correct in stating that Sheriff Eldon would like to see a repetition of that publicity, just as a kid would like to see Christmas come once a week.

"So far as the death of the young woman is concerned, Rush Medford seems to have kept his head and delivered about the best summary to date.

" 'We don't know who this young woman is,' Medford said. 'We don't know her motive in prowling around the barn of Carl Calhoun. But we do know she had no business being there. She received a kick from a horse which unfortunately proved fatal. Because Sheriff Eldon noted a discrepancy between the imprint of the shoe on the forehead of the victim and the size of shoe worn by the mare, he has inferred foul play. While he has not, as yet, claimed the death as a murder in so many words, he has insinuated as much.

" 'He had an opportunity to plant the seeds of sensationalism in ground where he knew they would promptly sprout. The temptation was too strong. I, personally,' Medford went on, 'abhor using public office as a means of securing publicity. Because of the prominence of Carl Carver Calhoun, who has done Rockville the honor of picking it as the place for his country residence, a duty was placed upon every official of the County to proceed cautiously and do everything possible to see that innocent parties were spared the embarrassment of that blatant publicity which always follows in the wake of sensationalism.'

"Carl Carver Calhoun was even more outspoken than the District Attorney. 'So far as the Sheriff is concerned,' he said, 'he is an old man and therefore I suppose I should be charitable. But it is hard to be charitable to a man whose every action seems actuated solely by a desire for personal aggrandizement. I warned him that because of my position and metropolitan connections the news value of anything connected with my name would be greatly magnified. I therefore asked him particularly to be cautious in his actions and not to jump at conclusions.

" 'This warning occurred after he had made an erroneous identification of the body in my stable as that of my daughter. Instead of heeding that warning, he went plunging on, confiscating private documents belonging to my daughter, which he doubtless hopes to release to the press at some future date.

" 'I am pleased to find that your District Attorney, Rush Medford, is a young man of broad mental caliber, the sort of timber from which we should select our Appellate Judges. I only wish the Sheriff had one-half his passion for accuracy, one-tenth of his intrinsic integrity.'

"So far, the body has not been identified, but the finding of a Kansas City label on the jacket and

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the imprint of a Kansas City shoestore in the almost-new shoes worn by the unfortunate victim have given authorities grounds to hope that an identification may soon be made."

The Sheriff read the *Rockville Gazette* on the early morning bus on his way to see Irma Jessup.

He found her just finishing breakfast in her apartment and getting ready to leave for the Trust Company where she was employed in the Escrow Department.

Irma Jessup listened to the Sheriff, and then elevated delicately arched eyebrows. Her call to Betty Turlock? Just a minor matter. Purely personal. Important enough so far as Betty was concerned but not important to anyone else. Yes, she had called several times. She had told Mr. Turlock that it was quite important. Then she had called another number which Mrs. Turlock had given her.

She laughed when faced with the fact that she had hung up the telephone on being advised that the Sheriff was on the other end of the line.

"Good heavens," she exclaimed. "I wondered what I'd stirred up. I just didn't know what to say, and so I hung up."

"You've read the papers?" the Sheriff asked.

"No, what about them?"

"A young woman was kicked by a horse in Calhoun's barn. Killed her."

Irma Jessup expressed consternation and sympathy.

"Any idea who she might have been?" Eldon asked.

"No, of course not."

"Well, now, I don't want to pry into things," Eldon said, "but I'm afraid I've got to know what it was you were calling up Betty Turlock about."

She was ready enough to talk now. "Betty is a nice wholesome girl. But—well, she isn't exactly Lorraine's type. Frank Garwin had been very much in love with Lorraine. I think Lorraine was in love with him. She put up money to get him through college. He'd had some bad luck. I've known Frank ever since we were children. In fact, Frank's folks and my folks were pretty close and there was some sort of business association between them. It was all part of the same transaction when my folks got wiped out. Mr. Calhoun had been in the same company but he was smart enough to pull out before things went bad. I remember he wanted my dad to pull out and I think he wanted Mr. Garwin to. Well, anyway, that will give you the background."

The Sheriff merely nodded.

She said, "I know Frank pretty well. Frank was in love with Lorraine and then—well, he was out of love with her. And I think Lorraine was out of love with him. There had been sort of a drifting apart. Lorraine was in Maine, spending the

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summer, and—I don't know, Frank thought her letters were a little cool. He talked to me about it."

"And he was down at Rockville some of the time visiting the family?"

"That's right."

"And got to seeing Betty down there?"

"Yes."

"All right. Now tell me about the telephone call."

"Frank took the bus and went to Rockville to see Betty. He didn't want anybody to know that he had gone there, but Lorraine found it out."

"How?"

"I don't know."

"How do you know that she knew it?"

"She called me and asked if Frank were here. She said she had to see him at once. I knew from the tone of her voice what was in the wind. I felt certain she was going to drive down to Rockville."

"And you were telephoning to tell Betty that Lorraine was on her way down?"

"That's right."

The Sheriff quite evidently was disappointed. "You don't know anything about some young woman from Kansas City about twenty-two years old, weighing about a hundred and twelve pounds, five feet four and a half inches, neat little figure, dark auburn hair, brown eyes?"

"No."

"Know of any girl of that description that might be a friend of Lorraine's?"

"No."

The Sheriff took a photograph from his pocket. "Making allowances for the closed eyes and that wound on the forehead, does she look like anyone you know?"

"Definitely no. I've never seen her in my life—not to remember."

The Sheriff thanked her and marked his early morning trip on the debit side of the ledger.

It was almost noon when the Sheriff climbed the stairs to his office. George Quinlan said, "Gosh, Bill, I've been trying all over to locate you."

"What's the trouble?"

"They've identified the body."

"Who is it?"

"Estelle Nichols of Kansas City. She had a charge account at the store where she bought the shoes and one of the clerks happened to remember her."

"Any connection with Calhoun?" the Sheriff asked, and couldn't keep the anxiety from his voice.

Quinlan shook his head. "Looks as though we're licked."

The Sheriff duly noted and appreciated the loyalty of the inclusive pronoun.

"The District Attorney," Quinlan went on, "has dug up a witness from somewhere, a girl who says this Estelle Nichols was crossing the country to join her, that she

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planned on hitchhiking. She'd got a letter from this girl that Medford is giving to the newspapers. It says that she was planning on sleeping in barns as she went through the country.

"She saw the Calhoun place all dark early in the evening. Evidently it was right after Sid Rowan had finished feeding the horses and had started for the movie. And that explains why she would have walked in the door without switching on the lights. She was groping around trying to find the ladder which led up to the hayloft when she ran into this horse."

"Which horse?" the Sheriff asked.

"Well," Quinlan said, "—well, a horse."

"A horse wearing a number-two shoe," the Sheriff said. "And if she was kicked by a horse wearing a number-two shoe, she didn't fall down where the body was found. Because right there a mare was stabled that was wearing a number-ought shoe."

Quinland said, "The forehead was flattened under the impact. Hawley says that would distort the impression made by the shoe."

Bill Eldon thought that over. "Maybe some," he admitted, "but not three-quarters of an inch."

Quinlan's dispirited voice showed how he felt. "Once they show this girl was a stranger to the Calhouns and went into a dark barn to find a place to sleep—well, we're licked, Bill. That's all there is to it."

"That letter," the Sheriff said. "Who's got it?"

"Rush Medford has the letter, but I took a photograph. Here it is. It's a life-sized copy."

The Sheriff took the photographic reproduction of the letter which Quinlan handed him. It read:

Dear Mae:

It won't be very long after you receive this letter that you'll see me. I'm going to make it even if I have to hitchhike my way and sleep in stables.

I feel certain that you'll listen to me, even if you have been hypnotized. There are some things I can tell you that will open your eyes.

And, Mae darling, will you see if you can locate the address of that man I was writing you about? I've lost track of him and I'd like to get in touch with him again.

The letter was signed, "Yours always, Estelle."

"Who's the girl that got this letter?" the Sheriff asked.

"Someone name of Mae Adrian."

"And where is she now?"

"Out at Calhoun's."

"Let's go," the Sheriff said.

Quinlan's manner showed some embarrassment. "Rush Medford's out there," he said, "and this lawyer of Calhoun's. They've got Ed Lyons out there, and I guess they're—well, I thought perhaps you'd like to wait until later."

Eldon grinned. "They're preparing a massacre. Is that right?"

"Well, you can put yourself in

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Ed Lyons' shoes," Quinlan said miserably.

Eldon placed his hand on his Deputy's shoulder. "George," he said; "I learned a long time ago that the only way to handle anything that has to be faced sooner or later is to wade right out in the middle and see how deep it is. Come on, let's go."

They made good time out to Calhoun's country residence. A half dozen cars were grouped around the stable. The Sheriff found a parking space, nodded to Parnell who was just coming through the gate from the Turlock place, and entered the stable.

He found Oscar Delano, Calhoun's attorney, virtually in charge of proceedings, with Rush Medford, the District Attorney, standing by and giving the benefit of his silent approval. A group of interested spectators was watching the city lawyer. There were, in addition, reporters and photographers from the city papers.

"Well, you can see the situation," Delano was saying to Ed Lyons, publisher of the *Gazette*. "This woman was a hitchhiker who, according to her own statement, was sleeping in stables. Someone took that button and sewed a vest on it. However, it's not for me, a rank outsider, to make any criticisms as to the efficiency of one of your County officials."

"Well," Medford said, "I'm the one to criticize. I . . . here he is now."

The Sheriff stepped forward. "Okay, Medford, I'm here."

Delano cleared his throat significantly, then became silent.

Ed Lyons said, "Well, Bill, you got right in the spotlight to fall flat on your face," and he laughed sarcastically.

Rush Medford said, "We have now identified this young woman. She was a hitchhiker who made a practice of sleeping in stables."

"Mae Adrian here?" the Sheriff asked calmly.

A trim young woman with dark hair and large dark eyes stepped forward and said in a thin, somewhat frightened voice, "I'm Mae Adrian."

"You knew this dead girl?"

She nodded.

"You've seen the body?"

"Yes," she said in almost a whisper.

"Positively identified it," Ed Lyons announced triumphantly.

"And this letter that you received from her, when did you get that?"

"A week ago."

"And what caused you to come forward?"

"I saw her pictures in the papers. I felt certain it was my friend, Estelle Nichols. So I got in touch with the District Attorney and he showed me the body. I identified it."

"And you don't know any of these people?" the Sheriff asked.

"No one."

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"What's this in the letter about you being hypnotized?"

She laughed. "Estelle had had an unfortunate love affair and she thought perhaps I was planning to do something she didn't approve of."

Oscar Delano said impatiently, "Well, there you are. The picture is complete. A young woman hitchhiking across the country picks my client's stable as a place to sleep and gets kicked by a horse. Some hick Sheriff sees a chance for notoriety and starts throwing his weight around."

The photographer for one of the metropolitan newspapers dropped to one knee, focused his camera, and set off a flash, catching Delano standing there in the stable, his attitude that of righteous indignation.

"And which horse do you figure kicked her?" the Sheriff drawled.

Delano whirled to face him. "Sheriff," he said, "I'm going to let you in on a big secret. The horse that kicked her," and here Delano lowered his voice impressively as though about to impart a very confidential secret, "was a quadruped that wore iron shoes. I can't tell you the color of his eyes. I leave that to you."

The roar of laughter that followed furnished inspiration for the news photographer to expose another film, one that showed the old Sheriff standing in the middle of the semicircle of hilarious spectators.

Lew Turlock and his daughter Betty walked across the strip of lawn from the Calhoun's barn, through the gate, and over toward Turlock's garage.

"I think it's a shame," Betty said. "All those people laughing at the Sheriff that way."

"Well, I guess he had his neck stuck out pretty far," Turlock said, and then added, "It's a darn good thing for you."

"Why?"

"Well, if it *had* been a murder and the thing had got to the point where they started a detailed investigation, and people found you were supposed to have been with Rose Marie—"

"I know, Dad. Let's skip it, please."

Turlock stopped abruptly. "That left rear tire's down," he said, indicating the family car. "Got to put some air in it."

He walked over to the car, took the ignition key from the lock, inserted it into the trunk, and raised the lid. "You get out the pump, Betty," he said, "and I'll—"

He broke off, staring at what he saw lying on the floor of the trunk—a bar with a prong in the form of a huge "Y." To this prong had been welded a horseshoe.

Betty said, "What in the world—"

Her father bent forward to examine the iron bar. The sinister stain on the horseshoe, with some hairs stuck to the reddish brown patches, bore mute evidence of the

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murderous purpose for which the weapon had been used.

"How in the world did *that* get there?" Betty asked, and reached toward it.

Her father grabbed her wrist. "Don't touch it! Leave a fingerprint on that and—"

He didn't need to finish the sentence. Betty's hand jerked away from the weapon.

Lew Turlock banged down the lid of the trunk and locked it.

"Betty, how *did* that get in there?"

"Dad, I don't know. I never saw it before."

"This man you were out with," Lew said. "What about him?"

"Frank?"

"Yes."

"What in the world are you suggesting?"

"Nothing, I'm asking questions."

"Why, Frank wouldn't hurt a fly!"

"Can you get him on the phone?" Lew Turlock asked, his face grim as granite.

"Why—yes, I suppose so."

"Come on in," her father said.

He stood at her side as she placed the long-distance call. When she had Frank Garwin on the line, Lew Turlock stepped to the telephone. "This is Betty's dad. I have a couple of pretty important questions to ask. Did you ever know an Estelle Nichols of Kansas City?"

There was a moment of hesitation. Then Garwin said, "Yes. I met her a year or so ago. She was working in a bank. Why?"

Turlock said, "That was the girl that was killed over in Calhoun's barn."

"Estelle Nichols killed in Calhoun's barn?" Garwin repeated incredulously.

"That's right. Didn't you see her pictures in the morning paper?"

"Yes. But I never thought it could have been—wait a minute. Hold the phone until I get the paper and take another look."

Turlock held the phone. A few moments later Garwin's voice came over the wire, a voice that was now filled with apprehension. "That *could* be Estelle," he said.

"Come out here," Turlock ordered, "and keep quiet until you get here. Make it just as quick as you can. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Turlock hung up the telephone, then turned to his daughter. "They've got that killing tagged as an accident now. If we can keep quiet, the thing will just naturally be hushed up."

"Father!"

She had never seen quite that expression in her father's face before.

"Blood is thicker than water," he said and turned away so that his daughter couldn't see his eyes.

Sheriff Eldon pushed his way through the gate between the Calhoun and Turlock properties and said to Lew Turlock, "Hope you

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don't mind if we look around a minute, Lew?"

Turlock, plainly nervous, said too effusively, "Certainly not. Sure. Go ahead. Help yourself. Anything I can do?"

The Sheriff said, "I don't know, Lew. Things just don't seem to check out in this case. Now, take that dead girl. Here's a girl hitchhiking across country. She comes into Calhoun's stable wearing a light dress, a skimpy little coat, and shoes with thin soles. And as for luggage—why, she didn't have so much as a toothbrush with her! What I want to know is, if that girl went in the stable and got kicked, what happened to all her stuff?"

"Yes," Turlock said nervously, "I see your point."

"Another thing," the Sheriff said. "According to Lorraine's story, she came tearing down here in her automobile and then proceeded to go out and walk for miles and miles along the country roads. Now that don't sound right."

"Don't seem so," Turlock admitted.

"You gettin' a soft tire on that car?" the Sheriff said. "Better pump her up before she goes completely flat."

Turlock moved away from the automobile. "I'll get at it. What you want to look around for, Bill?"

"I noticed that Calhoun girl smokes pretty much when she's nervous and I thought maybe she parked her car and kept an eye on your house. Lorraine was jealous of Betty. Of course, she won't admit it."

"Betty didn't even lift a finger—" Turlock said.

"I know, Lew, but if Lorraine was jealous and had picked a place where she could watch your house and at the same time keep an eye on her car, seein' her car was parked right in front of the stable, it stands to reason she must have seen this Estelle Nichols go into the stable."

"It was dark," Turlock pointed out.

"I know, but somebody must have opened the door of Lorraine's car and got into her glove compartment and got out the diary. I don't think you'd do that in the dark unless you knew what you were looking for and this Estelle Nichols apparently didn't know Lorraine Calhoun."

"Bill," Turlock blurted, "don't you think you'd be better off if you quit right now and let this thing just simmer down and run its course?"

"I'm licked now," Eldon said. "When that photographer got a picture of all those folks laughing at me over there, it put me in a spot. I can't get no worse off than I am right now. Come along election time, you can imagine what'll happen. Ed Lyons'll have that picture running in his paper and put under it something like, '*How about getting a Sheriff that folks don't laugh at.*' Say, that tire's got a leaky valve. You can hear the air hissing out of

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it if you listen right sharp. Reverse the valve cap and tighten up the valve. What say we save what little air is left in there?"

Turlock started to interpose himself between the Sheriff and the tire, then restrained himself. The Sheriff unscrewed the cap from the valve, reversed the end, and twisted with his thumb and forefinger.

"Shucks," he said, "that valve stem is loose in there. Now she's tight. Haven't got a pump in the trunk there, have you, Lew?"

"It's all right. I'll fix it," Turlock said. "Don't worry about my car, Bill. You've got lots of things on your mind. Go ahead and look around. Out there back of the pepper tree there's a swing. She might have sat in that."

"From there she could only see the back of the house," the Sheriff said. "Now over here by this hedge would be a good place where a person could . . . I think I'll look along there."

"Come on," Turlock said anxiously, leading the Sheriff away from the car. "Let's look."

They moved along the hedge. "Look here," the Sheriff said excitedly. "There's a newspaper spread out. Someone could have been sitting down there and spread the paper out to keep the grass from staining a dress and—sure enough! There's a dozen cigarette stubs. Now just a minute, Lew. I'd just as soon you didn't get around here. Let's kind of look for tracks—that's right. A person sitting right there and with her back to the hedge could see the front door of your house."

The Sheriff's voice trailed away into disappointed silence.

"And that's all she could see," Turlock said. "She couldn't see anything that happened over at Calhoun's place. Couldn't see the house, couldn't see the entrance to the stable, couldn't even see where the car was parked."

The Sheriff pursed his lips, then squatted to a sitting position, cowboy fashion.

"Well," he said, in a voice that was suddenly tired, "that's the way things go in life, Lew. You get something worked out and think you're doing all right and then something smacks you down. Of course, Lorraine is lying about getting out and walking up and down country roads. She sat down here where she could watch your house, just the way I figured she did. But I guess it ain't exactly a crime to watch your rival's door to see if your boy friend is taking her out. Anyway, that city lawyer over there would sure claim it wasn't."

The Sheriff started back along the hedge toward the fence and the gate.

Betty Turlock, opening the rear door of the house, stepped out to the porch and saw the Sheriff and her father approaching. Abruptly and self-consciously she jerked back into the house and pulled the door shut.

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Lew Turlock said hastily, "Betty's all upset. Just don't want to talk to anybody."

"Uh huh, I know how she feels," Eldon said.

They were approaching the gate when they heard voices.

A group moved through the gate to confront the Sheriff and Lew Turlock.

Parnell included in a gesture Carl Calhoun, Lorraine, Mae Adrian, and Oscar Delano.

"Look here, Eldon. I'm a businessman," Parnell said. "Now there's no sense having a lot of friction here. Mr. Calhoun's my friend and associate. He's bought this place here in the country and he's got to live here. I want him to enjoy it."

"Ain't no reason why he shouldn't," the Sheriff said.

"Yes, there is. This is a relatively small community. Mr. Calhoun has instructed his attorney to file suit against you on that mistaken identification business. And now that this other thing has been all cleared up, *I* think the whole thing should be dropped."

The Sheriff said, "That's up to Mr. Calhoun."

"We'll just wipe the whole slate clean," Parnell said. "We won't file suit. You'll quit trying to—"

"Trying to what?" the Sheriff asked.

Parnell was uncomfortably silent.

It was Calhoun who answered the question. "Trying to make capital out of an accidental death which unfortunately took place in my stables."

The Sheriff turned to Lorraine. "I want to ask Miss Calhoun here if she's absolutely certain after she parked her car she just went out and walked along the country roads the way she told me when I first talked with her."

Lorraine took a deep drag at the cigarette she was smoking, then said, "Father, isn't there any way you can put a muzzle on this—"

"Because," the Sheriff went on, "right over here on the edge of this hedge you can see where she spread out a newspaper to sit on. You can see the tracks of her high-heeled shoes in the soft soil along the edge of the hedge and you can see a dozen or so cigarette stubs of the particular brand she smokes. And if you want any proof on the time and date, why, the edition of the newspaper gives it to you. It's a late edition of the afternoon paper that comes out to bring results of horse races, and she must have picked it up just before she left the city yesterday."

Lorraine said calmly, "That's absurd."

"Well, now, ma'am, maybe it's absurd and maybe it isn't. There's some pretty good footprints there and I notice you wear a distinctive type of shoe."

"Great heavens," she said indignantly, "do I have to account for every step I take? How do I know whether I left a print there or not? I live here and I walk

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around. If you have any prints made by my shoes, they may be a week old."

"Nope, they aren't a week old," the Sheriff said. "They were made sometime yesterday—sometime after the rain had softened up the ground. And that newspaper shows they were made sometime after five o'clock at night. Now, if you'll be frank and tell me—"

"Come, come," Delano said in his smooth, suave voice. "Mr. Parnell was extending an olive branch, Sheriff. Now, if we're going to wipe the slate clean, we'll wipe it clean. After all, my client isn't particularly interested in sticking you for damages, but he has a perfect case. Now, if he's willing to drop it, we'll expect you to meet us halfway."

"Facts are facts," the Sheriff said. "I just want to get them sort of straightened out. And there's one other question I wanted to ask Miss Adrian here. This dead girl said something in her letter about trying to get an address of some man that she'd met. Who is that man?"

Mae Adrian said, "A young law student. She'd met him when he was on vacation a year ago."

"What's that fellow's name?" the Sheriff asked Mae Adrian.

"Good Lord," Calhoun groaned. "Don't you ever have enough? Must you always lead with your chin?"

"What's his name?" the Sheriff repeated.

Mae Adrian said, "No one whom you ever heard of before, Sheriff. He's a law student whose folks lived in Kansas City for a while and were in business there. A young man by the name of Frank Garwin."

"Frank Garwin!" Lorraine exclaimed. "Why, I know *him!* He's a very close friend."

"A friend of the family," Carl Calhoun hastened to add.

"I've known him for some years myself," Parnell said. "What about him?"

Mae Adrian was as nonplused at the bombshell she had dropped as a sportsman whose "unloaded" gun roars into an accidental discharge.

"Why I was going to try and find his address for Estelle. I didn't know . . . Of course, Estelle had just met him there the one time but I guess she had a crush on him. He's a young lawyer, I believe, and Estelle had some legal problem."

Oscar Delano said authoritatively, "Now look here, Sheriff, I'll grant you there's an element of coincidence here, but I don't want you trying to torture anything else into it."

Parnell turned to Lew Turlock. "Well, I still don't see that it changes the situation any. By the way, Mr. Turlock, I'm in need of a car. Perhaps you'd like to drive us to the city. I'll pay you well. I promised Miss Adrian I'd take her back with me. There'll just be the two of us."

"Maybe Miss Adrian ain't quite ready to go home yet," the Sheriff

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said, "the way things are shaping up now."

"Well, she'll be ready in a minute," Parnell said irritably. "How about it, Turlock?"

Turlock seemed undecided for a moment, then abruptly caught Bill Eldon's eye and motioned to him. "Bill," he said, "could I talk with you a minute private like?"

"How about taking us to the city?" Parnell asked impatiently.

Turlock said, "I'll tell you when I get back."

The Sheriff moved over a few yards from the little group. "What is it, Lew?"

Turlock said, "Bill, that wasn't any accident—the woman that got kicked in the barn."

"I didn't think it was," the Sheriff said.

"She was hit with a horseshoe put on a club."

The Sheriff let his eyes bore steadily into those of Turlock. "All right, Lew," he said quietly. "Let's have it."

Turlock said, "A few minutes ago I opened up the trunk on my automobile and—well, Bill, there's a club in there."

"What sort of a club?"

"An iron bar with a prong welded to it and a horseshoe welded to that prong. The thing's about two feet long. And—well, Bill, I guess it's the one that was used in the murder."

"Did you touch it?" the Sheriff asked. "That weapon?"

"No."

"Did Betty?"

"No."

The Sheriff said, "Don't say anything to anyone. Tell Parnell he can't use your car because after talking with me you found there's something you have to do uptown. Drive to the back of the courthouse and wait for Quinlan. Don't open up that trunk for anyone until Quinlan can take fingerprints. What does it look like—about a number-two horseshoe?"

"It's about a number-two," Turlock said, "and it has some caked blood on it. It's what killed her, all right."

The Sheriff and Lew Turlock rejoined the little group. Turlock said, "I'm sorry, Parnell, I've got to go to town. I guess you'll have to get some other car."

Parnell said, "The District Attorney's going into the city and he's taking Miss Adrian in with him. I'll go with him."

Rush Medford was perfectly willing to amplify that statement. "I'm going in to interview Frank Garwin," he said. "I have just talked with him over the long-distance telephone, using Lew Turlock's phone and a number given me by Miss Calhoun."

Medford's manner indicated that he had an important announcement to make and he waited until he had the attention of every person there before making it.

"Mr. Garwin has admitted to

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me over the telephone," he said, "that not only was he here yesterday night, but that a *friend* drove him over to San Rodolpho and put him on a bus at that point so he could get back to the city without anyone knowing he was here. The name of that *friend* was Bill Eldon, Sheriff of the County. Under the circumcumstances, I think an investigation is in order." He waited another dramatic moment, then turned to the newspaper reporter, "And you may quote me on that."

At the Sheriff's office in the courthouse George Quinlan finished dusting the grim murder weapon with a white metallic powder especially prepared to bring out latent fingerprints.

"Find anything?" Eldon asked.

"Not a thing," Quinlan said. "It's been wiped and polished with something that's removed every single print that was on it. It might have been a piece of soft leather."

Bill Eldon fished a cloth tobacco sack from his pocket, held a grooved paper in his left hand, and rolled a cigarette with a few deft motions.

"Well," he said, "when you run up against something like that, you just have to read trail, that's all."

"Only we haven't any trail," Quinlan said.

"Oh, yes, we have. We've got lots of trail."

"Such as what?"

"Well, to begin with, we've got the time element."

"Yes, that's right," Quinlan said. "Immediately after Sid Rowan left for the movies."

Eldon shook his head.

"But it has to be that time, Bill. Rowan had just fed the horses before he left. He put down hay for this mare. The body lying there disturbed her so she couldn't eat. The chute coming down from the loft was chock-full of hay."

"What kind of hay?" Eldon asked.

"What kind of hay?" Quinlan repeated. "Why, uh, hay."

"Barley hay," the Sheriff said. "Calhoun's feeding his horses oat hay. He got some barley hay for the cattle, feeds them some alfalfa hay and some barley. The oat hay is for the horses. It's been pretty hard to get."

Quinlan thought that over.

"What's more," the Sheriff went on, "the minute you run across a weapon like this, you know you're figuring on plain, cold-blooded, deliberate murder—murder that was thought out quite some time in advance. The idea was the murder would look like an accident. It'd just be some unfortunate girl that blundered into a stable and got kicked by a horse. Then at the last minute something happened that made the murderer change his plans."

Quinlan said, "For my money Garwin is the guilty party. He was getting along all right with Betty Turlock and then this girl that he'd known in Kansas City was coming

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out. He'd probably left her under circumstances that he didn't want disclosed to the girl he was going to ask to marry him."

The Sheriff scraped a match into flame and applied it to the end of his hand-rolled cigarette. "Well, now, George," he drawled, "let's look at it from all angles."

"I am."

"No, you're not. If Garwin killed her, he must have known she was going to come to that stable," the Sheriff stated.

"Known she was going to come there!" Quinlan exclaimed. "He *took* her there. He deliberately manipulated things so she went to the stable. That's why he was late keeping his date with Betty down at the high school grounds."

"Could be, of course," the Sheriff said.

"And if it is," Quinlan said, "we're worse off than we were before."

"How come?"

"You took Garwin over to San Rodolpho so he could get a bus and all that."

"I suppose so," the Sheriff admitted, "but somehow I don't size Frank Garwin up for that sort of a boy. He's a pretty nice young chap, sort of shy and sensitive. He wouldn't want to hurt a woman's feelings and would do almost anything to feel he was being a gentleman."

"That type fools you," Quinlan pointed out. "They get in a position from which there seems to be no escape. So then they try to get the obstacles out of the way. You take a two-fisted hard-boiled chap and he'd go to his girl friend and say, 'Look sister, you were a swell babe when I was in Kansas City but there's been a lot of water under the bridge since then and now I have met somebody I like a lot better.' "

The Sheriff nodded thoughtfully, his head wrapped in a cloud of cigarette smoke. "You got something there," he admitted after a moment, and then added after a few thoughtful seconds, "I'd like to play this so we could keep Betty out of it as much as possible. Lots of folks would think that Betty was sort of two-timing her folks, saying she was going out to spend the night with Rose Marie Mallard and then meeting this man Garwin."

"You can't help that," Quinlan said. "Every once in a while someone does something like that just when a murder turns on the spotlight."

"I know," the Sheriff interrupted, "but you take a nice kid like Betty Turlock. Sort of seems as though we could protect her a little."

"We've got our hands full protecting ourselves," Quinlan said. "By the time Ed Lyons gets done with a writeup about how there was only one person who knew Estelle Nichols and that person was mysteriously spirited out of town by none other than the Sheriff—"

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Bill Eldon nodded. "Oh, sure," he said philosophically, "Ed Lyons is a dirty fighter. You can't expect anything else."

The Sheriff smoked in silence for a few minutes. Then, as he came to the end of his cigarette, he pinched out the stub with all the care of a man who has spent much time in the forest. Abruptly he said, "You know, we've got one other clue, George, we're sort of overlooking."

"What's that?"

"Suppose you wanted to kill someone," the Sheriff said, "and get away with it? Would it ever occur to you to take them into a stable at night and hit them over the head with a horseshoe club so it'd look as though a horse had kicked them?"

"No," Quinlan said.

"Wouldn't to me either," the Sheriff said.

"But if you were going to kill someone with a horseshoe, you'd naturally want to do it in a stable," Quinlan pointed out.

"You said it, only you put it backwards."

"What do you mean?"

The Sheriff grinned, "If you were going to kill somebody in a stable, you'd maybe get the idea of killing them with a horseshoe. I think *now* we're beginning to get some place."

The Grand Jury, hastily called in special session by the District Attorney, sat grim-faced. These men were farmers and small businessmen with uncompromising standards of individual integrity. They would be just but stern, and the rumor that the Sheriff had got himself involved by smuggling a witness out of the County was due for a thorough investigation.

Out in the anteroom were the witensses whom Rush Medford had summoned. And waiting with his lips curled in a smile of anticipatory triumph was Ed Lyons, publisher of the *Rockville Gazette*, ready to drive the final nail in Bill Eldon's political coffin.

The District Attorney briefly outlined his position to the members of the Grand Jury. "The object of this investigation," he said, "is to find out just what's going on here. I think you folks are familiar with what's happened. A woman got into the stable of one Carl Carver Calhoun. She was kicked by a horse and died. There are some mysterious circumstances surrounding her death.

"For one thing, the diary of Lorraine Calhoun was found in the manger of the stall in front of which the body was lying. One page had been torn out. It's pretty apparent now that this woman's trip to that stable was not accidental. It was made with some definite purpose and it was probably made with a companion.

"Apparently there is only one person whom this woman knew and who also knew the Calhouns and the setup of the Calhoun stable. That person is Frank Garwin. I

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want you gentlemen to hear his story. I want you to hear how he left this County. I want you to hear who picked him up and drove him to San Rodolpho.

"I am not going to make any comments as to the motive back of all this. It's the duty of this body to investigate this whole thing. Now then, gentlemen, I want Frank Garwin called as a witness. And I want his testimony taken down in shorthand."

One or two of the jurors looked over to where Bill Eldon was sitting, tight-lipped. Here and there were glances of sympathy. But the foreman of the Grand Jury voiced the sentiments of all of its members when he said to Medford, "You're the District Attorney. Go ahead with your witnesses. If there's anything wrong with the way any of the offices in this County are being run, we aim to do something about it."

Frank Garwin was brought in and interrogated by the District Attorney. He told the same story he had told the Sheriff, admitting, however, that he knew Estelle Nichols, the dead girl, but denying he had known that she was anywhere in the state. He had, he said, lost track of her something over a year ago. They had, he admitted, been friendly, but since then he had had what he referred to as "other interests."

Medford passed by the "other interests" in order to get to the point which was of most interest to him.

"Now, Frank," he said, "last night you were here in Rockville?"

"Yes, sir."

"And where did you go after you left the Calhoun barn?"

"I didn't go to the Calhoun barn."

"Well, we'll skip that for the moment. Did you see the Sheriff of this County last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"Well, he picked me up down at the ball park."

"And what did he do?"

"He—well, he gave me a lift to where I could catch the bus for the city."

Rush Medford said, "Now think carefully, young man. Let's not have any misunderstanding about this. Did he take you to where *you* wanted to get the bus, or did he suggest that he should take you to a certain place to get the bus?"

"Well, he suggested it."

"Why?"

"He thought that it might be just as well if my friends didn't see me around here."

"I see," Medford said sarcastically. "Spirited you out of town, and he did that in a County car, I believe, using the County tires and the County gasoline."

Garwin was silent.

"Come, come, young man," the District Attorney said. "Let's at least answer questions. That's a fact, isn't it?"

"I guess it was the County car.

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It had a red spotlight on it."

"That's all," Medford said.

The foreman of the Grand Jury turned to the Sheriff. "You want to ask this boy any questions to try and clear this thing up, Bill?" he asked.

The Sheriff merely shook his head.

The Grand Jurymen exchanged glances. There was sympathy in those glances, but there was also a certain underlying significance.

The foreman said to Garwin, "That's all, young man. You can go back to the room with the other witnesses. You're not supposed to tell them anything about what questions were asked you and you're not supposed to tell anybody what testimony you gave."

When Garwin had gone, the foreman said, "The way I size things up, Bill, the boys sort of think this calls for an explanation of some sort."

Heads nodded gravely about the Grand Jury room.

"Well," the Sheriff said, "the way I look at this case, gentlemen, it was murder. A plain, cold-blooded, deliberate murder."

Medford said, "That's fantastic and absurd on the face of it. But the mere fact that you *think* that it's a murder case makes your conduct in spiriting one of the principals in the case out of the county doubly culpable. Now, as I see it, gentlemen, it's pretty clear that this man, Garwin, must have gone to the barn with this young woman. He must have been there when she got kicked, and he must have tried to keep himself from being involved in the subsequent notoriety by simply sneaking out and getting this Turlock girl to give him an alibi.

"Now I propose to call this Turlock girl and prove that she doesn't know where Garwin was *at the time* this woman was killed, that she had an appointment with him and Garwin stood her up and kept her waiting for something like an hour—simply because he was in Calhoun's barn with this Estelle Nichols. May I now call Betty Turlock?"

The Sheriff said, "I just want to point out that I was makin' an explanation when the District Attorney interrupted me."

The foreman nodded. "You go ahead and explain, Bill."

"When you have a murder case," the Sheriff said, "lots of little things become important. But *every* little thing isn't important. The way I see it, there's no use taking a nice girl like Betty Turlock and putting her up here in front of this Grand Jury simply to show the man she's in love with was a little bit late in keeping his appointment."

"Oh, certainly," Medford said sarcastically. "The things that *you* don't want brought out are the unimportant little things. But when you get a half-inch or so discrepancy in the measurement of a horseshoe—"

"Now that will be about all out

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of you for a minute, Rush Medford," the Sheriff said. "I'm making my explanation to the Grand Jury. You can talk afterwards."

"That's right, Rush," the foreman said. "Let's give Bill a chance to explain."

"Now then," Bill Eldon went on, "when I say that was cold-blooded, deliberate murder, I know what I'm talking about. The mare wears a number-ought shoe. The wound was made with a number-two shoe. The mare wouldn't hardly have struck up high enough with a kick to have kicked the girl on the forehead if she'd been standing back of the manger. And you'll notice from the wound, the main force was on the *upper* part of the horseshoe. Now, if the mare had kicked up, she'd be puttin' the power on the *bottom* part of the shoe."

Medford sneered, "The trouble is with that argument, it proves too much. You're proving that *no* horse could have kicked the girl."

"That's right, Medford," the Sheriff said. "You're gradually getting the idea. And if you want to see what killed the girl, here it is."

The Sheriff nodded to Quinlan. Quinlan brought forward the iron club with the horseshoe welded onto it.

The Grand Jurors left their seats and crowded around the lethal weapon.

"Where did you get this?" Medford asked.

"Never mind," the Sheriff said. "I'm making an explanation right now. Now, you gentlemen hadn't better touch this yet because there's some blood and hairs on the horseshoe that we may need for evidence. There aren't any fingerprints on the thing because we've tested it carefully. Someone rubbed it with a piece of chamois skin or something and got all the fingerprints off. Now, if you boys will just go back and sit down, I'll tell you what happened."

The Grand Jurors resumed their seats. The District Attorney moved over to regard the welded horseshoe in frowning anger.

"To kill a girl with a horseshoe so it would look like an accidental kick by a horse," the Sheriff went on, "you'd want to be sure everyone knew she'd gone into a barn. Now, I've got a theory that when this Estelle Nichols wrote her friend that she'd sleep in barns if she had to, she signed her death warrant right there. I think someone who knew about that letter got Estelle Nichols in the barn, and then, when he had her in the right position, clubbed her over the head.

"You see, he had to make just one blow do the job in order to make it look right. He had this diary with him and he needed both hands to swing this club around with the force he needed. He'd torn one page out of the diary, which was the only reason he was after it in the first place. And not having any more use for the diary, he just tossed it

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into the manger when he swung around to strike that blow.

"The murderer intended to go pick up that diary later on, but he'd figured without the mare. The mare was so nervous that the killer was afraid to go into the stall. As far as he was concerned, there wasn't any particular need to get that diary because he'd already torn out the one page that he'd wanted destroyed."

"You say this was a man?" the foreman asked the Sheriff.

"Sure it was a man," the Sheriff said. "For one thing, look at the welding job. You don't go into some blacksmith shop and ask to have a club welded on a horseshoe when you're intending to go out and murder someone with it. You do the job yourself. Since the war there are some women that know a lot about welding, but to me it looks like a man's job.

"And there are two or three other things that make it look like a man that's been around the country a little bit but not quite enough. A man who doesn't realize there's a difference in the size of shoes on horses. A man who doesn't know the difference between barley and oat hay. Remember what Estelle Nichols wrote this Adrian girl in a letter. You've got a photograph of it there. Somethin' about in spite of the fact she was hypnotized she hoped Mae would listen when Estelle told her the things that you just couldn't put on paper. Figure that out and that means a man."

Heads nodded in unison around the Grand Jury room.

"Now then," the Sheriff said, "if it's a man, it means that Mae Adrian is protecting him, because, according to my theory, the man must have seen that letter from Estelle saying she was going to come out here and sleep in stables if she had to. Right away he made up his mind that he was going to see she was killed in a stable so it would look like an accidental death.

"You can figure it out for yourselves. If this Estelle Nichols really had been sleeping in stables, she wouldn't have slept in one this close to the end of her journey. She could have hitchhiked her way into the city within a couple of hours, joined her friend, and had a bath and a good bed. What's more, no one's ever found anything belonging to this young woman except the clothes she was wearing. Now, if she'd been hitchhiking, she certainly must have had a *few* things with her.

"Therefore, the way I figure it, she had already been in to see Mae Adrian. And the man that killed her picked her up and brought her back to the Calhoun barn. Then he probably went back to Mae Adrian and said to her, 'Look, Mae, the most awful thing happened. Estelle and I were in a barn and a horse kicked her. I don't want anybody to know that I was in there with her because it would ruin my business. And seeing it was an

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accident, you just keep quiet and it will all blow over.'

"Remember that this club shows the murder had been deliberately planned. The man who did it hoped he could make an 'accident' out of it; but in case he couldn't, he had a second string to his bow. He was going to frame it on Frank Garwin. Why? Because he knew for one thing young Garwin was going to be in Rockville that night. For another, he knew about Estelle asking for Frank's address in that letter.

"That gives us another clue. The man not only knew Mae Adrian real well, but he also knew Frank Garwin, and he also must have known Sid Rowan and his wife were planning to go to a movie. And he also knew Garwin would have an alibi for the last part of the evening. So, if he had to make it murder and pin it on somebody, he wanted the time element mixed up so it would seem the mare hadn't been able to eat her hay because of the body being there.

"So after the killing he put more hay down the feed chute—but he gave himself away by putting in barley hay instead of oat hay. He tried to show the mare wasn't hungry, and in doing that left the best clue of all, because the mare had been hungry and had eaten her hay—the oat hay Sid Rowan had put down for her. But later on the murderer had tried to show the mare wouldn't eat by putting down more hay—and because he couldn't tell the difference between oat hay and barley hay, he proved the fact we were dealing with cold-blooded murder.

"But this murderer was feeling pretty well satisfied with himself. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, the death would have been considered just an accident and passed off as such. But if something went wrong, he had only to plant the murder weapon in a car which Frank Garwin had been in the night of the killing—*and then be sure the weapon was found at just the right time.* That was the most important thing of all.

"To fix that up, he did a simple thing. He unscrewed the valve in one of the rear tires on Turlock's car just enough to make some of the air leak out. Now if you gentlemen are interested in all this, let's get Mae Adrian in and ask her a couple of questions."

There was a chorus of quick, eager assents.

Rush Medford started to say something; then, at the expressions he saw on the faces about him, changed his mind and remained silent.

Mae Adrian came in and was sworn.

The foreman said to the Sheriff, "Suppose you ask her the questions, Bill."

The Sheriff smiled at the nervous young woman. "Mae," he said in his kindly, drawling voice, "you might as well answer a few questions

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for us here. We don't like to pry into your private affairs, but we've got to clean this thing up."

She nodded.

"Now then," the Sheriff said, "when you said that you were about to do something Estelle didn't approve of, did that mean you were going to get married?"

"Well, not exactly, I was going with someone, and I was going to let him invest some money I had inherited."

"Pretty handy with tools, isn't he? Makes you little gadgets out of steel and things?"

Her face lit up. "Yes, he does. He makes me hammered-brass trays and he welds tubing into ornamental candlesticks and—"

"And what's his name?" the Sheriff asked.

"He doesn't want me to tell who he is and I'm not going to."

"Did he know Estelle Nichols?"

"I guess so . . . Yes."

"She'd known him pretty well, hadn't she?"

"Well, yes."

"And you showed this man this letter from Estelle and told him she was coming out, didn't you?"

"Yes."

The Sheriff said in a kindly voice, "Now come, Miss Adrian, let's be frank. That man is Henry Parnell, isn't he?"

She clamped her lips together.

"Come, come," the Sheriff said. "You might just as well come clean as get in trouble with the Grand Jury for not answering questions. He and Estelle Nichols went to call on Calhoun and a horse kicked Estelle and killed her and then he didn't want Calhoun to know he'd been with this girl in his barn. So you agreed to help him hush it up since it was an accident anyway, and nothing you could do would bring your friend back to life."

She started to cry.

"And then after it began to look as though things were getting pretty hot, Parnell told you it would be better for you to identify the body and give that letter to the authorities, saying that she intended to sleep in barns, so it would look as though she had gone into Calhoun's barn to sleep. Now that's right, isn't it, Mae?"

She nodded, still sobbing.

"That's a good girl," the Sheriff said. "Now you just go in that other room and wait a minute and we'll talk things over later on after you've got to feeling better."

Once she had left the room, the Sheriff turned to the Grand Jury. "Well, gentlemen," he said, "there we are. I suppose we may as well talk with Parnell. Think we got a pretty good case against him, no matter what he says or doesn't say."

"What I don't get," the foreman said, "is how you knew it was Parnell?"

"Well," the Sheriff said, "first rattle out of the box, the murderer had tried to make it look like an accident. When he saw he wasn't

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going to be able to get away with that, he tried to blame the murder on Frank Garwin. Parnell was pretty anxious for me to find that murder weapon there in Lew Turlock's car. The way the air was going out of that tire, the valve hadn't been unscrewed very long.

"I tried to think back, of who left the gathering there in the barn to go over to Turlock's place, and it was Parnell. When I drove up he was coming in through Turlock's gate. He'd gone over and unscrewed the core in the valve stem. And then, of course, when he wanted to rent the car, I knew he *must* be the one, because his idea was to get the car, then call attention to that flat tire, and get Lew to open the trunk where the murder weapon had been planted.

"There are two or three other things. That page missing from the diary showed that the murderer must have had some contact with Lorraine Calhoun back in April. It must have been something that Lorraine wouldn't remember particularly unless she got to reading her diary. Probably when she was in Kansas City her friends had told her something about a slicker named Parnell. She'd put something about this friend in her diary and then forgotten about it.

"But one of Parnell's Kansas City friends knew it was there and must have written him. Made it awkward for Parnell when he was just about to interest Calhoun in a business deal. The thing probably came through Frank Garwin 'cause you remember Parnell blurted out he'd known Frank for years, but he hadn't known Calhoun near that long. So Parnell must have known Frank in Kansas City.

"And that's another thing to remember. Whoever did the thing knew Lorraine's car with her diary in the glove compartment was going to be parked there at the stable, knew Garwin was going to be seeing Betty Turlock secretly, knew Sid Rowan was going to a movie, knew his way around the Calhoun barn, but didn't know what sort of hay Calhoun was feeding the horses.

"Shucks, it's a cinch, gentlemen—just a plain straight trail pointing to one man and to one man alone, a man who had double-crossed a girl in Kansas City and was now trying to rig another deal here with a friend of hers and getting ready to fleece a rich man. Put that all together and you *know* who it was."

"Well," the foreman said, "let's get Parnell in here and see if we can get anything out of him. Probably we can't, but we can try."

Parnell came in and took the stand, his manner that of being courteous and helpful.

The Sheriff said, "Mr. Parnell, you sure you never knew this Estelle Nichols?"

"Absolutely."

"You know Mae Adrian, don't you?"

"Why, I saw her today, yes."

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"But you knew her before that?"

"I—ah—may I ask what is the object of this questioning?"

"Just tryin' to get at the facts," the Sheriff said.

"Well, I think I'm entitled to a little something more than that."

"The question," the Sheriff said, "is do you or don't you know Mae Adrian?"

Parnell looked around at the circle of grim, purposeful faces.

"I don't think I care to answer that question."

"Why not?"

"Frankly, I don't think it's any of your business and I don't like the attitude of the men here."

The Sheriff abruptly produced the murder weapon.

"I now show you a number-two horseshoe welded to an iron bar. Ever seen that before?"

"No, I suppose that's some sort of a branding iron, but it's a new one on me. I've never seen it before."

"You will admit, won't you, that you told Mae Adrian you'd gone to the barn with Estelle Nichols and that there'd been an accident? That a horse had kicked her and that you wanted your name kept out of it?"

Parnell wet his lips. "I refuse to answer that question."

"On what grounds?" the Sheriff asked.

Parnell took a deep breath, then said desperately, "On the grounds that the answer might incriminate me."

"You're darn right it would," the Sheriff said. "We don't even *need* an answer. We've got Mae Adrian's testimony and we're going out and take a look at that little hobby workshop of yours and see if we can't find some left-over materials that'll analyze just about the same as the stuff in this murder weapon. And as far as *you're* concerned, Mr. Parnell, you're going to stay right here in the county jail until we've worked up a murder case against you."

The Sheriff unlocked the front door of his house. It was nearing midnight and he was dog-tired. He'd had a strenuous period of activity and now that the excitement and strain were over, there was a terrific letdown. No use kidding himself, he wasn't as young as he used to be.

Very quietly the Sheriff tiptoed across the hall. His sister-in-law would be demanding all the latest news if he saw her.

He had almost reached his bedroom when he saw his sister-in-law attired in pajamas and slippers, sitting by a floor lamp in the living room. Across her lap was the evening edition of the *Rockville Gazette* with its big headlines: "CROWD GIVES SHERIFF THE HORSELAUGH."

The Sheriff tiptoed over and stood silently looking down at Doris' face. She had removed both upper and lower plates, which gave her face a peculiarly collapsed expression, but even in sleep and with

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her teeth out there was a sharp, ferret-like expression in the contour of her features. She had carefully drawn her chair to a place where she could command a view of the entrance to the garage through the parlor window and where no one could enter by the front door without her seeing him.

Bill Eldon leaned gently over the sleeping figure, picked up the paper and crossed out the word "Sheriff" in the headlines, inserting the word "Publisher"—so that the headlines read:

"CROWD GIVES PUBLISHER THE HORSELAUGH."

Gently the Sheriff tiptoed into his bedroom.

From the pillow his wife's voice arose sleepily, "Did you see Doris out there?"

The Sheriff chuckled. "I saw her," he said. And then, a few seconds later, as he was slipping out of his outer garments, added "first."

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BEST MYSTERIES OF 1965

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Even more than the rest of the 1960's, 1965 was the Year of the Spy. There were far too many spy novels published (close to 80) and even far too many books about the spy story, of which the most distinguished was the critico-historical anthology

TO CATCH A SPY, *edited by Eric Ambler* (Atheneum, $4.50)

Best of the year's spy-thrillers, in virtually a dead heat, were

THE QUILLER MEMORANDUM, *by Adam Hall* (Simon & Schuster, $4.50)
FUNERAL IN BERLIN, *by Len Deighton* (Putnam, $4.95)

with Hall winning possibly by half a nose. Special notice goes to an unusually strong first spy novel, to a charming adventure-romance with elements of espionage, and to an extraordinary psychological novel of a spy-ridden world:

THE EXPENDABLE SPY, *by Jack D. Hunter* (Dutton, $4.95)
AIRS ABOVE THE GROUND, *by Mary Stewart* (Mill-Morrow, $4.95)
THE DAY THE CALL CAME, *by Thomas Hinde* (Vanguard, $4.50)

I for Ingenuity to the creators of two (out of many) variants: a female counterpart of James Bond, and a Cromwellian spy of 1654:

MODESTY BLAISE, *by Peter O'Donnell* (Doubleday, $4.50)
A FIREWORK FOR OLIVER, *by John Sanders* (Walker, $3.50)

But the year was not all spies. For thrilling suspense-adventure and international intrigue without espionage:

MIDNIGHT PLUS ONE, *by Gavin Lyall* (Scribner's, $4.50)
THE STRODE VENTURER, *by Hammond Innes* (Knopf, $4.95)

For acutely feminine views of crime, in widely varying styles:

THE JEALOUS ONE, *by Celia Fremlin* (Lippincott, $3.50)
THE LEGEND OF THE SEVENTH VIRGIN, *by Victoria Holt* (Doubleday, $4.95)
BEFORE THE BALL WAS OVER, *by Alexandra Roudybush* (Crime Club, $3.50)

For that rarest of forms, the genuinely comic crime novel:

THE FUGITIVE PIGEON, *by Donald E. Westlake* (Random, $3.95)

And for detection, still the basic and vital element of the mystery story, there was detection plus horses and adventure:

FOR KICKS, *by Dick Francis* (Harper & Row, $3.95)

detection with fascinating slow slogging routine:

THE LAST KNOWN ADDRESS, *by Joseph Harrington* (Lippincott, $3.50)

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Hammett-descended tough detection with acute social commentary:

THE FAR SIDE OF THE DOLLAR, *by Ross Macdonald* (Knopf, $3.95)

and, in my favorite novel of the year, police detection with cockeyed wit and warmth:

THE PERFECT MURDER, *by H. R. F. Keating* (Dutton, $3.95)

It was a particularly good year for John Creasey, who published 12 novels, under 4 names, with 5 publishers—among them, 3 of his best:

LOOK THREE WAYS AT MURDER, *by John Creasey* (Scribner's, $3.50)
CUNNING AS A FOX, *by Kyle Hunt* (Macmillan, $3.95)
GIDEON'S BADGE, *by J. J. Marric* (Harper & Row, $3.95)

And it was a grand year for imports from beyond the London-New York Axis, with admirable novels from France, Holland, Australia (alas, posthumously) and, most significantly, the USSR:

MAIGRET CINQ, *by Georges Simenon* (Harcourt, Brace & World, $5.95)
DOUBLE BARREL, *by Nicolas Freeling* (Harper & Row, $3.95)
BONY AND THE BLACK VIRGIN, *by Arthur Upfield* (Collier 02596, 95¢)
PETROVKA 38, *by Julian Semyonov* (Stein & Day, $4.95)

Anthologies were frequent but often shoddy, aside from the predictable Queen gems, Davenport's witty selection, and the splendid pulp-revival by novice editor Goulart, which should rank as Anthology of the Year:

ELLERY QUEEN'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY ANNUAL (Random, $4.95)
ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY 1965 MID-YEAR EDITION (Davis, $1.25)
ELLERY QUEEN'S 1966 ANTHOLOGY (Davis, $1.25)
13 WAYS TO KILL A MAN, *edited by Basil Davenport* (Dodd, Mead, $4)
THE HARDBOILED DICKS, *edited by Ron Goulart* (Sherbourne, $4.95)

And add a shrewd book of classic detection aimed at young readers:

FAVORITE SLEUTHS, *edited by John Ernst* (Doubleday, $3.95)

Collections by individual authors were highlighted by one book of pastiches and one of novelets:

THE CASEBOOK OF SOLAR PONS, *by August Derleth* (Mycroft & Moran, $5)
QUEENS FULL, *by Ellery Queen*

Fact-Crime for the year was headed by the first collection of deFord's brilliant essays, closely rivaled by three noteworthy treatments of individual cases—studies, respectively, in sociological and psychological horror, and in literary comedy:

MURDERERS SANE & MAD, *by Miriam Allen deFord* (Abelard-Schuman, $5)
A LITTLE GIRL IS DEAD, *by Harry Golden* (World, $5)
THE TRIAL OF DR. DE KAPLANY, *by Carolyn Anspacher* (Fell, $5)
THE GREAT SHAKESPEARE FORGERY, *by Bernard Grebanier* (Norton, $5)

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THE 10th NOBEL PRIZE WINNER

William Butler Yeats

At the time of this writing it is 100 years—a full century—since William Butler Yeats was born, and although he devoted nearly 60 years of his life to intense creativity, the depth and scope of his literary influence, in poetry and drama and essays, are just beginning to be fully realized.

But who would have dreamed that William Butler Yeats wrote prose (highly poetic prose, it is true) that belongs in the mystery genre? Yet here is a story—virtually "unknown" and in that sense a "discovery"—of murder and arson, of rebellion and reprisal, of hunters and hunted, of moonlight and mystery . . .

William Butler Yeats is the 10th Nobel Prize winner to appear in EQMM. In case you may have missed them, the 9 Nobel Prize winners whose stories have previously been published in EQMM are Rudyard Kipling, George Bernard Shaw, Sinclair Lewis, John Galsworthy, Pearl S. Buck, T. S. Eliot (a crime poem that could never have been written by Mr. Eliot had not A. Conan Doyle first created Sherlock Holmes and The Great Detective's arch-enemy), William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, and John Steinbeck . . .

THE CURSE OF THE FIRES AND OF THE SHADOWS

by WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

ONE SUMMER NIGHT, WHEN THERE WAS PEACE, A SCORE OF PURITAN troopers under the pious Sir Frederick Hamilton, broke through the door of the Abbey of the White Friars at Sligo. As the door fell with a crash they saw a little knot of friars gathered about the altar, their white habits glimmering in the steady light of the holy candles. All the monks were kneeling except the abbot, who stood upon the altar steps with a great brass crucifix in his hand. "Shoot them!" cried Sir Frederick Hamilton, but nobody stirred, for all were new converts, and feared the candles and the crucifix. The white lights from the altar threw the shadows of the troopers

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up on to roof and wall. As the troopers moved about, the shadows began to dance among the corbels and the memorial tablets. For a little while all was silent, and then five troopers who were the bodyguard of Sir Frederick Hamilton lifted their muskets, and shot down five of the friars. The noise and the smoke drove away the mystery of the pale altar lights, and the other troopers took courage and began to strike. In a moment the friars lay about the altar steps, their white habits stained with blood. "Set fire to the house!" cried Sir Frederick Hamilton, and a trooper carried in a heap of dry straw, and piled it against the western wall, but did not light it, because he was still afraid of crucifix and of candles. Seeing this, the five troopers who were Sir Frederick Hamilton's bodyguard went up to the altar, and taking each a holy candle set the straw in a blaze. The red tongues of fire rushed up towards the roof, and crept along the floor, setting in a blaze the seats and benches. The dance of the shadows passed away, and the dance of the fires began. The troopers fell back towards the door in the southern wall, and watched those yellow dancers springing hither and thither.

For a time the altar stood safe and apart in the midst of its white light; the eyes of the troopers turned upon it. The abbot whom they had thought dead had risen to his feet and now stood before it with the crucifix lifted in both hands high above his head. Suddenly he cried with a loud voice, "Woe unto all who have struck down those who have lived in the Light of the Lord, for they shall wander among shadows, and among fires!" And having so cried he fell on his face dead, and the brass crucifix rolled down the steps of the altar. The smoke had now grown very thick, so that it drove the troopers out into the open air. Before them were burning houses. Behind them shone the Abbey windows filled with saints and martyrs, awakened, as from a sacred trance, into an angry and animated life. The eyes of the troopers were dazzled, and for a while could see nothing but the flaming faces of saints and martyrs. Presently, however, they saw a man covered with dust who came running towards them. "Two messengers," he cried, "have been sent by the defeated Irish to raise against you the whole country about Manor Hamilton, and if you do not stop them you will be overpowered in the woods before you reach home again! They ride northeast between Ben Bulben and Cashel-na-Gael."

Sir Frederick Hamilton called to him the five troopers who had first fired upon the monks and said, "Mount quickly, and ride through the woods towards the mountain, and get before these men, and kill them."

In a moment the troopers were gone, and before many moments they had splashed across the river at what is now called Buckley's Ford, and plunged into the woods. They followed a beaten track that wound along the northern bank of the river. The boughs of the birch and quicken trees mingled above,

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and hid the cloudy moonlight, leaving the pathway in almost complete darkness. They rode at a rapid trot, now chatting together, now watching some stray weasel or rabbit scuttling away in the darkness. Gradually, as the gloom and silence of the woods oppressed them, they drew closer together, and began to talk rapidly; they were old comrades and knew each other's lives. One was married, and told how glad his wife would be to see him return safe from this harebrained expedition against the White Friars, and to hear how fortune had made amends for rashness. The oldest of the five, whose wife was dead, spoke of a flagon of wine which awaited him upon an upper shelf; while a third, who was the youngest, had a sweetheart watching for his return, and he rode a little way before the others, not talking at all. Suddenly the young man stopped, and they saw that his horse was trembling. "I saw something," he said, "and yet I do not know but it may have been one of the shadows. It looked like a great worm with a silver crown upon his head." One of the five put his hand up to his forehead as if about to cross himself, but remembering that he had changed his religion he put it down, and said, "I am certain it was but a shadow, for there are a great many about us, and of very strange kinds." Then they rode on in silence. It had been raining in the earlier part of the day, and the drops fell from the branches, wetting their hair and their shoulders. In a little they began to talk again. They had been in many battles against many a rebel together, and now told each other over again the story of their wounds, and so awakened in their hearts the strongest of all fellowships, the fellowship of the sword, and half forgot the terrible solitude of the woods.

Suddenly the first two horses neighed, and then stood still, and would go no further. Before them was a glint of water, and they knew by the rushing sound that it was a river. They dismounted, and after much tugging and coaxing brought the horses to the riverside. In the midst of the water stood a tall old woman with grey hair flowing over a grey dress. She stood up to her knees in the water, and stooped from time to time as though washing. Presently they could see that she was washing something that half floated. The moon cast a flickering light upon it, and they saw that it was the dead body of a man, and, while they were looking at it, an eddy of the river turned the face towards them, and each of the five troopers recognised at the same moment his own face. While they stood dumb and motionless with horror, the woman began to speak, saying slowly and loudly, "Did you see my son? He has upon his head a crown of silver." Then the oldest of the troopers, he who had been most often wounded, drew his sword and said, "I have fought for the truth of my God, and need not fear the shadows of Satan," and with that rushed into the water. In a moment he returned. The

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woman had vanished, and though he had thrust his sword into air and water he had found nothing.

The five troopers remounted, and set their horses at the ford, but all to no purpose. They tried again and again, and went plunging hither and thither, the horses foaming and rearing. "Let us," said the old trooper, "ride back a little into the wood, and strike the river higher up." They rode in under the boughs, the ground-ivy crackling under the hoofs, and the branches striking against their steel caps. After about twenty minutes' riding they came out again upon the river, and after another ten minutes found a place where it was possible to cross without sinking below the stirrups. The wood upon the other side was very thin, and broke the moonlight into long streams. The wind had arisen, and had begun to drive the clouds rapidly across the face of the moon, so that thin streams of light were dancing among scattered bushes and small fir trees. The tops of the trees began also to moan, and the sound of it was like the voice of the dead in the wind; and the troopers remembered that the dead in purgatory are said to be spitted upon the points of the trees and upon the points of the rocks. They turned a little to the south, in the hope that they might strike the beaten path again, but they could find no trace of it.

Meanwhile, the moaning grew louder and louder, and the dancing of the moonlight seemed more and more rapid. Gradually they began to be aware of a sound of distant music. It was the sound of a bagpipe, and they rode towards it with great joy. It came from the bottom of a deep, cuplike hollow. In the midst of the hollow was an old man with a red cap and withered face. He sat beside a fire of sticks, and had a burning torch thrust into the earth at his feet, and played an old bagpipe furiously. His red hair dripped over his face like the iron rust upon a rock. "Did you see my wife?" he said, looking up a moment; "she was washing! she was washing!" "I am afraid of him," said the young trooper, "I fear he is not a right man." "No," said the old trooper, "he is a man like ourselves, for I can see the sun freckles upon his face. We will compel him to be our guide"; and at that he drew his sword, and the others did the same. They stood in a ring round the piper, and pointed their swords at him, and the old trooper then told him that they must kill two rebels, who had taken the road between Ben Bulben and the great mountain spur that is called Cashel-na-Gael, and that he must get up on the horse before one of them and be their guide, for they had lost their way. The piper pointed to a neighbouring tree, and they saw an old white horse ready bitted, bridled, and saddled. He slung the pipe across his back, and, taking the torch in his hand, got upon the horse, and started off before them, as hard as he could go.

The wood grew thinner now, and the ground began to slope up toward

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the mountain. The moon had already set, but the stars shone brightly between the clouds. The ground sloped more and more until at last they rode far above the woods upon the wide top of the mountain. The woods lay spread out mile after mile below, and away to the south shot up the red glare of the burning town. The guide drew rein suddenly, and pointing upwards with the hand that did not hold the torch, shrieked out, "Look; look at the holy candles!" and then plunged forward at a gallop, waving the torch hither and thither. "Do you hear the hoofs of the messengers?" cried the guide. "Quick, quick! or they will be gone out of your hands!" and he laughed as with delight of the chase. The troopers thought they could hear far off, and as if below them, rattle of hoofs; but now the ground began to slope more and more, and the speed grew more headlong moment by the moment. They tried to pull up, but they could not, for the horses seemed to have gone mad. The guide had thrown the reins onto the neck of the old white horse, and was waving his arms and singing in Gaelic. Suddenly they saw the thin gleam of a river, at an immense distance below, and knew that they were upon the brink of the abyss that is now called Lug-na-Gael, or in English the Stranger's Leap. The six horses sprang forward, and five screams went up into the air, a moment later five men and horses fell with a dull crash upon the green slopes at the foot of the rocks.

EDITORIAL NOTE: Next month's issue will include a story by the 11th Nobel Prize winner to appear in EQMM. Watch for it—a Compleat Calendar of Skulduggery and Sleuthery—Bertrand Russell's *The Corsican Ordeal of Miss X*—fantastic and fascinating!

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JAMES HOLDING**

TITLE: ***Grounds for Divorce***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *John Marcy was an All-American heel—a woman-crazy, middle-aged wolf. Everybody knew it—his friends, his lawyer, his wife. And John Marcy admitted it . . .*

THE POWER FAILURE LASTED LESS than five minutes—but it came at an awkward time.

John Marcy, soup spoon in hand, was seated at the dining table ready to start his dinner. He was hungry.

Angela, his wife, who had just carried the filled soup plates in from the kitchen and taken her own seat across the table, was reaching out a hand toward the cracker dish when the house lights flickered once, then winked out.

"Oh, dear!" Angela said, startled. "Now what? Look out the front window in the living room, John, and see if the neighbors' lights are out, too. Maybe it's just ours."

John put down his soup spoon obediently, groped his way into the living room, and looked out the front window. "Even the street lights are out," he reported over his shoulder. "It's a general power failure, I guess."

He could hear Angela moving in the darkness of the dining room behind him. "I've got candles," she said in a moment, "if you'll get the matches from the coffee table in there."

John cautiously located the coffee table in the blackness and explored its surface for the book of matches always kept near the ashtray. As his hand closed on it, a match flared in the dining room, and a second later two candles set in silver candlesticks on the table were dissipating the darkness.

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"Never mind, John," Angela called, "I found a match in the buffet drawer. Come on and eat your soup now. It'll get cold."

Before John got back to his chair at the table, the electric lights came on again.

"Ah," said Angela with relief. "That's better." She didn't blow out the candles.

John picked up his soup spoon and then, with a distraught air, put it down again. He looked across the table at Angela whose gentle blue eyes were regarding him anxiously. "Is the soup cold, dear?" she asked. She took a sip of her own. "Mine isn't."

He shook his head. How lovely she is, he thought, and what a heel I've been to go running after those other women. His conscience was suddenly tender. An unaccustomed pang of shame caused him to lower his eyes.

"No," he said, "I don't suppose it's cold, darling, but I'm not very hungry tonight."

"It's yellow pea soup, John. You love it."

"I know." He raised his head. "And I love you, too, Angela. You know that, don't you?"

Her eyes filled with tears. "Let's not go into that again," she said, trembling.

John said, "I'm an All-American heel, Angela, I admit it. A woman-crazy, middle-aged wolf who ought to know better. And I'm genuinely sorry for it."

Angela brushed aside her tears with the back of a flexed wrist, a somehow pathetic gesture. She stood up. "Now you've spoiled *my* appetite," she said. She picked up the two soup plates and carried them out to the kitchen.

"So I want to divorce her," John Marcy told his lawyer quietly the next day.

Bartley, the lawyer, aimed a faintly disapproving glance at his client and friend. "Divorce her?" he echoed. "*You* want to divorce *her?*"

"Yes."

"Don't make me laugh, John. It's common gossip in town that *she* ought to divorce *you*. And I know the score, John, so don't try to kid me. I haven't forgotten those breach-of-promise suits and the paternity action I had to settle for you, John."

"I'm not forgetting them either. I just want to divorce Angela, that's all. And I need your advice on how to go about it. That's simple, isn't it?"

"Not all that simple, no. Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why do you want to divorce her all of a sudden after letting things drift along like this for years?"

"Because she won't divorce me, that's why. And I want to be free of her."

"Yes, but why won't she divorce you? Some foolish idea that this way she can punish you for your past peccadillos?"

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"No. You'll think I'm even more insufferable than you do now if I tell you the true reason."

"Try me and see."

John hesitated. Then he said, "Well, it's my considered opinion, knowing Angela as I do, that she won't divorce me because she still loves me."

"That's no reason," Bartley said.

"It is if she doesn't want another woman to get her hooks into me permanently," John said. "She knows how vulnerable and—uh—undiscriminating I am." He paused. "You realize it isn't easy for me to talk like this, Bart."

"Go on," Bartley said, and with the privileged candor of long friendship he added, "Everybody knows you're a heel, John. No need to be embarrassed in front of me."

Marcy flushed and plowed on doggedly. "Angela has decided that if she can't enjoy my full-time love and loyalty, no other woman will get a chance at it, either."

"Is that what Angela says?"

"Not in so many words, no. But I'm positive it's how she feels."

"How can you be positive about a thing like that?"

"From her actions, Bart. From her attitude lately."

"And you want to charge mental cruelty, is that it?"

"No, you don't understand at all." Marcy sighed.

"I'll say I don't. But I might remind you, John, that even in these enlightened times you need stronger grounds for divorce than a simple statement that your wife loves you and you're sure of it."

John said, "Don't clown with me, I'm serious. I tell you I want to divorce Angela."

"I'm not clowning. But you've got to have grounds. Angela's got plenty—but you haven't. Understand?" Bartley didn't wait for an answer. He went on, "Exactly when did you decide you had to divorce Angela? Maybe that'll help."

Resignedly John said, "Last night. At the dinner table."

"What happened?"

"We had a power failure in our neighborhood. The lights went out."

"Well, well." Bartley lit a cigarette and examined his client's glum face with interest. "That certainly explains a lot."

"It did to me," John said, "even if you think it's some sort of joke."

Exasperated, the lawyer leaned back in his swivel chair. "Nothing about divorce is some sort of joke, as you call it," he snapped. "So be serious about this, John! Tell me about the lights going out, if you think it's important."

"It's important, all right. The lights were out for only a couple of minutes, but during that brief period of total darkness I suddenly found out Angela's true feelings for me, Bart." John was dragging out the words reluctantly. "I'm being honest with you."

"Good," Bartley said. "So in the dark you had this great revelation

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of Angela's true feelings. What did she do—try to seduce you, or what?"

Marcy shook his head. "I'm sorry to make you pry it out of me like this, Bart," he apologized. "But I was pretty surprised at the time, and I'm not over my confusion yet."

"Obviously. But let's have it. You're stalling."

"I suppose I am," Marcy admitted. He took a deep breath. "Well, you've got to get the picture. Angela had just brought in our soup. We were ready to begin eating. And it was at that instant, with our soup plates on the table before us, that the lights went out."

"All right. What then?"

"Then," Marcy said, "then I saw that Angela was trying to kill me."

"Kill you!" Bartley dropped his cigarette on the rug and swore as he stamped it out.

"That's what I said. Kill me. Poison me. She had poisoned my soup."

Bartley stared at him, shaking his head. "But in the dark—" he began.

"If the lights hadn't gone out, I'd be dead. I'd have eaten that damned soup and gone where no waitress or chorus girl could ever give me the come-on again." For the first time Marcy smiled. "My soup was loaded with yellow phosphorus."

"How did you know?"

"High school chemistry. When the lights went out, my soup glowed in the dark like a plate of incandescent paint."

After a dazed moment Bartley managed to whisper, "Attempted murder."

"Is that grounds for divorce?"

"Should be enough for a starter," Bartley said, swallowing.

"Angela, poor darling, tried to distract my attention from the soup," John went on. "She got candles lit as soon as she could, to hide the soup's phosphorescence." He paused. Then he said, "Understand, Bart, I'm telling this to nobody but you. If you go to Angela and tell her you know all about her attempt to murder me last night, I think that out of shame she'll consent to divorce me for the old-fashioned reasons. But I don't want the police to hear a word about this."

"Why not?" asked the lawyer. "After all, attempted murder—"

"Because Angela still loves me, as I told you—enough to want to kill me, if that's the only way she can keep me straight. And in my own stupid way I still love her—now more than ever, perhaps. I don't want the police hounding her."

Bartley hunched his shoulders in pure bafflement. He said, "If you and Angela still love each other so much, why not stay together? Why not go on through life hand in hand, as the poet says? Why a divorce?"

John Marcy stood up. He gave the lawyer a crooked grin. "Everybody knows I'm a heel," he said. "But that's a little different from being a fool. There might not be a power failure the next time."

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NEWEST Sir John Appleby story by MICHAEL INNES

Sir John Appleby—now the Commissioner of Metropolitan Police—at his scintillating best . . . a short-short—about 2500 words—with more twists and turns, more clues and red herrings, than are usually present in a story three times as long . . .

DEATH IN THE SUN

by MICHAEL INNES

THE VILLA STOOD on a remote Cornish cape. Its flat roof commanded a magnificent view, but was not itself commanded from anywhere. So it was a good spot either for sun-bathing, or for suicide of a civilized and untroublesome sort. George Elwin appeared to have put it to both uses successively.

He lay on the roof, bronzed and stark naked—or stark naked except for a wrist watch. The gun lay beside him. His face was a mess.

"I don't usually bring my week-end guests to view this kind of thing." The Chief Constable had glanced in whimsical apology at Commissioner Appleby. "But you're a professional, after all. Elwin, as you see, was a wealthy man with unassuming tastes." He pointed to the watch, which was an expensive one, but on a simple leather strap. "Poor devil!" he added softly. "Think, Appleby, of taking a revolver and doing that to yourself."

"Mayn't somebody have murdered him? A thief? This is an out-of-the-way place, and you say he lived here in solitude, working on his financial schemes, for weeks at a time. Anybody might come and go."

"True enough. But there's £5000 in notes in an unlocked drawer downstairs. And Elwin's fingerprints are on the gun—the fellows I sent along this morning established that. So there's no mystery, I'm afraid. And another thing: George Elwin had a history."

"You mean, he'd tried to kill himself before?"

"Just that. He was a hypochondriac, and always taking drugs. And he suffered from periodic fits of depression. Last year he took an enormous dose of barbiturate—again he was naked like this, in a lonely cove. He seems to have had a fancy

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for death in the sun. But the coast guard discovered him in time, and they saved his life."

Appleby knelt beside the body. Gently, he turned over the left hand and removed the wrist watch. It was still going. On its back the initials *G. E.* were engraved in the gold. Equally gently, Appleby returned the watch to the wrist, and buckled the strap. For a moment he paused, frowning.

"Do you know," he said, "I'd rather like to have a look at his bedroom."

The bedroom confirmed the impression made by the watch. The furnishings were simple, but the simplicity was of the kind that costs money. Commissioner Appleby opened a wardrobe and looked at the clothes. He removed a couple of suits and studied them with care. He returned one, and laid the other on the bed.

He then opened a cupboard and found it crammed with medicine bottles and pill boxes. There could be no doubt about the hypochondria. Appleby started a systematic examination.

"Proprietary stuffs," he said. "But they mostly carry their pharmaceutical name as well. What's tetracycline for, would you suppose? Ah, it's an antibiotic. The poor chap was afraid of infection. You could work out all his fears and phobias from this cupboard. Various antihistamines—no doubt he went in for allergies in a big way. Benzocaine, dexamphetamine, sulphafurazole—terrible mouthfuls they are—in every sense. A suntan preparation. But look, barbiturates again. He could have gone out that way if he'd wanted to—there's enough to kill an elephant, and Elwin's not all that bulky. Endless analgesics—you can bet he was always expecting pain."

Appleby glanced round. "By the way, how do you propose to have the body identified at the inquest?"

"Identified?" The Chief Constable stared.

"Just a thought. His dentist, perhaps?"

"As a matter of fact, that wouldn't work. The police surgeon examined his mouth this morning. Teeth perfect—Elwin probably hadn't been to a dentist since he was a child. But, of course, the matter's merely formal, since there can't be any doubt of his identity. I didn't know him well, but I recognize him myself, more or less—even with his face like that."

"I see. By the way, how does one bury a naked corpse? Still naked? It seems disrespectful. In a shroud? No longer fashionable. Perhaps just in a nice business suit." Appleby turned to the bed. "I think we'll dress George Elwin that way now."

"My dear Appleby!"

"Just rummage in those drawers." The Commissioner was inexorable. "Underclothes and a shirt, but you needn't bother about socks or a tie."

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Ten minutes later the body—still supine on the roof—was almost fully clothed. The two men looked down at it somberly.

"Yes," the Chief Constable said slowly. "I see what you had in mind."

"I think we need some information about George Elwin's connections. And about his relatives, in particular. What do you know about that yourself?"

"Not much." The Chief Constable took a restless turn up and down the flat roof. "He had a brother named Arnold Elwin. Rather a bad-hat brother, or at least a shiftless one—living mostly in Canada, but turning up from time to time to cash in on his brother George's increasing wealth."

"Arnold would be about the same age as George?"

"That's my impression. They may have been twins, for that matter." The Chief Constable broke off. "In heaven's name, Appleby, what put this notion in your head?"

"Look at this." Appleby was again kneeling by the body. Again he turned over the left hand so that the strap of the wrist watch was revealed. "What do you see on the leather, a third of an inch outward from the present position of the buckle?"

"A depression." The Chief Constable was precise. "A narrow and discolored depression, parallel with the line of the buckle itself."

"Exactly. And what does that suggest?"

"That the watch really belongs to another man—someone with a slightly thicker wrist."

"And those clothes, now that we've put them on the corpse?"

"Well, they remind me of something in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*." The Chief Constable smiled grimly. "Something about a giant's robe on a dwarfish thief."

"I'd call that poetic exaggeration. But the general picture is clear. It will be interesting to discover whether we have to go as far as Canada to come up with—"

Appleby broke off. The Chief Constable's chauffeur had appeared on the roof. He glanced askance at the body, and then spoke hastily.

"Excuse me, sir, but a gentleman has just driven up, asking for Mr. Elwin. He says he's Mr. Elwin's brother."

"Thank you, Pengelly," the Chief Constable said unemotionally. "We'll come down." But when the chauffeur had gone he turned to Appleby with a low whistle. "Talk of the devil!" he said.

"Or, at least, of the villain in the piece?" Appleby glanced briefly at the body. "Well, let's go and see."

As they entered the small study downstairs, a bulky figure rose from a chair by the window. There could be no doubt that the visitor looked remarkably like the dead man.

"My name is Arnold Elwin," he

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said. "I have called to see my brother. May I ask—"

"Mr. Elwin," the Chief Constable said formally, "I deeply regret to inform you that your brother is dead. He was found on the roof this morning, shot through the head."

"Dead?" The bulky man sank into his chair again. "I can't believe it! Who are you?"

"I am the Chief Constable of the county, and this is my guest Sir John Appleby, the Commissioner of Metropolitan Police. He is very kindly assisting me in my inquiries —as you, sir, may do. Did you see your brother yesterday?"

"Certainly. I had just arrived in England, and I came straight here, as soon as I learned that George was going in for one of his periodical turns as a recluse."

"There was nobody else about the place?"

"Nobody. George managed for himself except for a woman who came in from the village early in the morning."

"Did you have—well, a satisfactory interview?"

"Nothing of the kind. George and I disagreed, so I left."

"Your disagreement would be about family affairs? Money—that kind of thing?"

"I'm damned if I see what business it is of yours."

There was a moment's silence during which the Chief Constable appeared to brood darkly. Then he tried to catch Appleby's eye, but failed to do so. Finally he advanced firmly on the bulky man.

"George Elwin—" he began.

"What the deuce do you mean? My name is Arnold Elwin, not—"

"George Elwin, by virtue of my office I arrest you in the Queen's name. You will be brought before the magistrate, and charged with the willful murder of your brother, Arnold Elwin."

Appleby had been prowling round the room, peering at the books, opening and shutting drawers. Now he came to a halt.

"It may be irregular," he said to the Chief Constable. "But I think we might explain to Mr. Elwin, as we can safely call him, just what is in our minds."

"As you please, Appleby." The Chief Constable was a shade stiff. "But do it yourself."

Appleby nodded.

"Mr. Elwin," he said gravely, "it is within our knowledge that Mr. George Elwin, the owner of this house, was, or is, subject to phases of acute depression. Last year one of these led him to an actual attempt at suicide. That is our first fact.

"The second is this: the wrist watch found on the dead man's hand was not fastened as it would normally have been fastened on the wrist of its owner. The dead man's is a slimmer wrist.

"The third fact connects with the second. The clothes in this house are too big for the dead man. But I

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think they would fit you very well."

"You're mad!" The bulky man had got to his feet again. "There's not a word of truth—"

"I can only give you what has been in our minds. And now I come to a fourth fact: George and Arnold Elwin were not readily distinguishable. You agree?"

"Of course I agree. George and I were twins."

"Or Arnold and you were twins. Now, our hypothesis is as follows: you, George Elwin, living in solitude in this house, were visited by your brother Arnold, just back from Canada. He demanded money or the like, perhaps under some threat. There was a violent quarrel, and you shot him dead—at close quarters.

"Now, what could you do? The wound was compatible with suicide. But who would believe that Arnold had arrived here, gained possession of your gun, and shot himself? Fortunately there was somebody who *would* readily be believed to have committed suicide, since he was known to have made an attempt at it only a year ago. That somebody was yourself, George Elwin.

"So you, George Elwin, arranged the body of your brother, and arranged the gun, to suggest something fairly close to a repetition of that known attempt at suicide. You strapped your own watch to the dead man's wrist. The clothes in the house would hang loosely on him—but he would be found naked, and who would ever be likely to notice the discrepancy in the clothes?

"The dead body, maimed in the face as it was, would pass virtually unquestioned as George Elwin's. And that is all. You had ceased abruptly to be George, and so had lost what is probably a substantial fortune; but at least you had an identity to fall back on, and you weren't going to be charged and convicted of murder."

"But it's not true!" The bulky man seemed to be in blind panic. "You've framed me. It's a plot. I can prove—"

"Ah," Appleby said, "there's the point. If you are, in fact, George pretending to be Arnold, you'll have a very stiff fight to sustain the impersonation. But, if, as you claim, you are really Arnold, that's a different matter. Have you a dentist?"

"Of course I have a dentist—in Montreal. I wander about the world a good deal, but I always go back to the same dentist. At one time or another he's done something to nearly every tooth in my head."

"I'm uncommonly glad to hear it." Appleby glanced at the Chief Constable. "I don't think," he murmured, "that we ought to detain Mr. Arnold Elwin further. I hope he will forget a little of what has been—well, shall we say, proposed?"

Appleby turned back to Elwin. "I'm sure," he said blandly, "you will forgive our exploring the matter in the interests of truth. You arrived, you know, when we had not quite

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sorted out all the clues. Will you please accept our sympathy on the tragic suicide of your brother George?"

"You mean to say," the Chief Constable asked half an hour later, "that I was right in the first place? That there was no mystery?"

"None whatever. George Elwin's depression was deepened by the visit of his brother, and he killed himself. That's the whole story."

"But dash it all—"

"Mind you, up to the moment of your charging that fellow with murder, I was entirely with you. And then I suddenly remembered something that didn't fit—that £5000 you found here in an unlocked drawer. If George had killed Arnold and was planning to *become* Arnold—or anybody else—he'd certainly have taken that money. So why didn't he take it?"

"I can see the force of that. But surely—"

"And then there was something else—something I ought to have seen the significance of at once. The dexamphetamine in the medicine cupboard. It's a highly efficient appetite depressant, used for dieting and losing weight. George Elwin was slimming. He'd come down here, I imagine, principally to do so. It was the latest expression of his hypochondria.

"He could lose fourteen pounds in a fortnight, you know—which would be quite enough to require his taking up one hole in the strap of his watch. And in a month he could lose thirty pounds—which would produce your effect of the giant's robe on the dwarfish thief. George Elwin's first call, had he ever left here, would have been on his tailor—to get his suits taken in."

The Chief Constable was silent for a moment.

"I say!" he said. "We did give that unfortunate chap rather a bad fifteen minutes."

Appleby nodded soberly.

"But let's be thankful," he said, "that one of Her Majesty's judges isn't burdened with the job of giving somebody a bad fifteen years."

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Here is the fourth in our new series of spy-and-counterspy tales about "The Double-C Man"—Rand of the Department of Concealed Communications. We hope you have not missed the three earlier stories (EQMM, issues of May, August, and December of last year). This is an outstanding series of new spy stories.

THE SPY WHO TOOK THE LONG ROUTE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

THE BIG JET CAME IN LOW OVER Hoihong harbor, and Rand got his first look at the familiar clutter of junks and barges that was home to one-tenth of the city's population. Hoihong was a city much like Hong Kong, both in geography and politics —a place where East and West met, touched uncomfortably, and tried unsuccessfully to turn away from each other.

Though the British had given up territorial rights to Hoihong in the last decade, there was still an almost Colonial atmosphere about the crowded streets and shops with their lingering touches of Britannia. Rand disliked travel, and he especially disliked the Far East with its too-bold mixture of old and new; but from his first hour in Hoihong he knew there was something different about this place.

The difference began with Arthur Fraze, a career man who had been the chief British Intelligence agent in Hoihong since the time of the Korean war. Fraze wore a white suit and smoked a calabash pipe, but there was about him little of the quiet efficiency which Rand had come to expect in London.

"Terrible place," he told Rand by way of greeting. "You should have stayed home."

Rand smiled and took out his sunglasses against the noonday glare. "I thought you sent for me."

Arthur Fraze motioned him toward a waiting Embassy car. "The new Ambassador. He was looking through my reports and decided that Double-C should be consulted on the Kudat affair. I didn't realize they'd send somebody out here."

They climbed into the air-conditioned car and Fraze gave a quick command to the driver. Rand settled back to enjoy the strangeness of the unfamiliar countryside. "It can't be too bad," he observed. "You haven't been back to England since you came out here."

Arthur Fraze shifted the big pipe to the other side of his mouth. "I'm pleased they still remember that

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back in London. Sometimes I feel like 'the forgotten man' out here. I spend my days conferring with CIA agents and my nights drinking toasts at the Russian Embassy. I keep track of people like Ivor Kudat, and count the number of Red Chinese in town, but mostly I just sweat and curse the weather."

"Doesn't it ever rain?"

"In the rainy season, it rains. Then the streams overflow and flood out the peasants and they come clamoring to us for aid. That's why a lot of them give up and live on junks in the harbor."

They swung past a large gray building that stood in silence behind an iron fence. "The Russian Embassy?" Rand asked, remembering the pictures he had studied.

Fraze nodded. "They're having a reception tomorrow night for our new Ambassador. You can get an inside look at the place then."

"Would it be wise for me to attend?" Rand asked.

"Why not? They had a man at the airport watching your arrival. It's no secret."

Rand settled back in the seat. The ways of the Far East were indeed puzzling, and not at all like London. He was beginning to wonder just how important the affair of Ivor Kudat would prove to be.

The new British Ambassador was a smooth-talking white-haired man whose skin was tanned and creased from two years in Iran. He shook hands firmly and spoke with quick precision. "I've heard a good deal about the Department of Concealed Communications, Mr. Rand. I think there may be something here for you. Arthur can fill you in on the details."

The Ambassador paused at the door of his study and added, "The Russians are having a reception for me tomorrow. You're invited, of course."

"Thank you," Rand mumbled.

Arthur Fraze seated himself behind his desk and gently tapped the dead tobacco out of his pipe. "I can see you still have the London outlook on things—the chessboard, with the Reds on the other side in Moscow where you never see them. We see them all the time here. There's a diplomatic reception at least once a week at some Embassy or another. There are fewer diplomats in Hoihong, so we all go to these things."

"I'm afraid I couldn't drink with the Russians all night and then spend my days trying to outwit their agents."

Arthur Fraze shrugged and started refilling his pipe. "The pace is different here." He reached into his desk and took out a flashlight. "Ever see one of these?"

Rand had seen several. Without a word he removed the batteries and studied them. He slipped the cardboard wrapper off one and split it easily into two halves. "A microdot reader," he said finally.

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Arthur Fraze nodded. "Of course you know all about microdots."

Rand disliked showing off his knowledge, but there were times when it was necessary. "That's part of my job. A spy named Kroger used them quite extensively in London a few years back. I had a hand in trapping him. The Russian unit is quite good, really—a microcamera that can shrink an entire page to the size of a pinhead. Microdots can be hidden anywhere—on the page of a book, in a letter, on a photograph. They're next to impossible to stumble on unless you suspect they're present."

"The Reds use them a great deal?"

Rand nodded. "More so all the time. The microcamera has been around for more than twenty years—in fact, the Germans used them on a limited basis during the second World War. But they've really come into their own only recently. Our side has a micro-microcamera now that is capable of reducing the entire Bible to an area half the size of a postage stamp. The individual letters are no larger than bacteria." He continued studying the disguised reader. "I gather this man Kudat is using microdots?"

Fraze nodded. He produced next a picture postcard showing the harbor of Hoihong. It was addressed to a doctor in Berne, Switzerland. The message, in English, was a vague comment about the weather, signed with the name of Ivor Kudat.

For a long moment Rand studied both sides of the postcard, searching for the microdot he knew was there. He couldn't spot it. Fraze laughed and pointed finally to a tiny dot in the picture. "Here. Two centimeters from the bottom, hidden in the details of the photo. And here's a blowup of it."

Rand studied the photoprint that Fraze handed him. It was a typed list of number and letter designations, followed by other numbers that seemed to be latitude and longitude. "What is it?"

"The exact positions of all the United States ships in this area, as of 1200 hours yesterday."

Rand came suddenly alert. The whole thing wasn't a game after all. "This is the sort of thing he's been sending every week?"

Arthur Fraze nodded and bit on his pipe. "The first couple I intercepted didn't mean a thing to me, but then I checked with Perkins, the local C.I.A. man, and he told me what they were. It's a regular pattern now. Kudat mails one of these cards every Tuesday morning. I intercept it, find the microdot, enlarge it, then show it to the C.I.A."

"You want me to discover how he gets his information?"

Fraze shook his head. "We're quite sure we know that. His mistress works in the United States Naval Operations office here. It's the nerve center for their whole Pacific fleet. No, that's not our problem."

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"Then what is? Why don't you simply arrest him and be done with it?"

Fraze leaned back in his chair and frowned. "You see, he mails these postcards to his contact in Switzerland every Tuesday. We have a connecting jet flight to Rome and Berne every day, but we have only one ship leaving for Europe each week, usually on Sunday. The ship takes about seventeen days to make the trip to Genoa, sometimes longer. Am I making myself clear?"

"I don't quite—"

"Ivor Kudat doesn't send these cards with their carefully hidden microdots by air mail. He sends them by ship. The information must take at least three weeks to reach the Russians—in fact, it's completely useless by the time it reaches them. There's your problem, Mr. Rand: why does Kudat deliberately take so long to get the information to them?"

Toward evening they drove over to the American Embassy, a glistening new building with an eagle over the door and too many windows. "They should put a fence up, like the Russians," Rand commented, as the two of them were ushered inside to meet the American C.I.A. man.

As at most U.S. Embassies, the C.I.A. agent held some nominal title on the official staff. The real job of David Perkins was known to almost everyone in Hoihong, especially to the Russians. "Sometimes they kid him about it at parties," Fraze had said earlier.

"This is a great town for kidding."

"We have our serious moments."

David Perkins was younger than Fraze by a good ten years, and even to Rand he seemed too young for the position he held. But he had a certain businesslike manner that had been lacking in Fraze, and Rand warmed to him quickly.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Rand," Perkins said. "Of course I've heard a great deal about Double-C."

"I'm amazed our fame has spread this far from London."

The American smiled. "We'll see how well you do on this thing. Arthur and I have tended to let the case drift, because Kudat's messages obviously weren't reaching the Russians in time to do them any good. But your new Ambassador wants action. Maybe he's right."

Rand lit one of his American cigarettes. "Tell me about Ivor Kudat."

It was Fraze who answered. "He's some odd mixture of nationalities, partly Oriental. Lived in Australia for a time after the war. Now he's here, writing his postcards every week."

"Is there any evidence that he's a paid agent?"

The C.I.A. man nodded. "I can answer that one. I got interested in Kudat after my first look at those microdots. One hundred British pounds are deposited to his account

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in the Bank of China every single week."

"Then the Russians must consider his information valuable."

"How could they? We've had men watch that house in Berne. The postcards take at the very least three weeks to reach their destination. By that time our ships have changed position dozens of times."

"You always allow the messages to go through?"

Fraze nodded. "After we've checked them. A few times David here has had them retyped and rephotographed to eliminate something that might help the Russians even after three weeks."

"All right," Rand said. "I want to see this problem clearly. Just how do you intercept the postcards, Fraze?"

The man smiled and took a grip on his pipe. "You must remember this was once a British territory. I still have certain contacts in the post office."

"Contacts that will open mail for you?"

Arthur Fraze held up a protesting hand. "Postcards, remember! Everyone reads postcards. We only divert them for a brief time. They sit in the post office for nearly a week anyway, waiting for the ship."

Rand had a thought. "Someone reads them while they're waiting in the post office."

Fraze shook his head. "My man is the only one who sees them. He sorts the mail and seals them into pouches. He's an ignorant native who wouldn't know the first thing about microdots. And he couldn't read them without special equipment, anyway. The sealed mail pouches aren't opened until the ship docks in Genoa. One thing I'd stake my career on, Rand—nobody reads those microdot messages until the card reaches Berne."

"It would seem that the Russians are merely stupid," Rand said. "They're paying a hundred pounds a week for nothing."

Had he made this trip for nothing? It certainly appeared so . . . Rand decided to relax and enjoy himself. Perhaps he'd even go to the Russian reception the following evening.

The next afternoon Rand went off on his own. He toured the narrow streets of the city, passed the eager faces of occasional tourists, the more frequent glazed stares of the narcotics addicts. It was a city of contrasts, where British merchants still conducted business next to Red Chinese shops whose window displays frequently denounced the White Imperialists. It was a city where crime and vice flourished only a few blocks from the staid and respectable Embassy district.

Rand had to admit that the weather was hot, and he already regretted wearing such a heavy suit. He felt that he should catch the next jet back to London, or at the least find some nice air-conditioned bar

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in which to relax. Instead, he was seeking out the man named Ivor Kudat, thinking that in a city like Hoihong the easiest solution to the problem might be simply to ask Kudat why he sent those cards by ship instead of by plane.

When he finally saw Kudat—recognizing him from photographs as the spy met a slim blonde girl outside the gate of the United States Naval Operations Center—Rand suddenly changed his mind. He'd known a good many secret agents on both sides during the years in London, and he recognized at once the smooth touches of a professional.

Kudat was neither too suspicious nor overly casual. He acted like a man who was meeting his wife after a day's work, kissing her half-heartedly, and steering a path toward a waiting car. But in the space of a minute this short, dark-haired man in a baggy suit managed to spot Rand in his car mirror and recognize him as an enemy. He drove the car through a maze of back streets and lost Rand almost at once.

All right, then. Kudat was a professional. But that still didn't mean he was outwitting them somehow. The messages went by boat . . . Why boat? Why not by plane?

The reception at the Russian Embassy was a formal affair that seemed almost like a family party. The members of the diplomatic colony were an inbred lot, and they welcomed the new British Ambassador as an honored member of their exclusive circle. No one thought it odd that the Russians were among the first to welcome him, and no one thought it signified any sort of Cold War thaw. Everyone was very polite, some were a bit drunk, and the women were all beautiful.

The diplomats lived in a world of their own, a world very far from the jungle trails of Viet Nam or the spy schools of Moscow. Seeing the Russians like this, openly drinking and joking with the Ambassador and Fraze, Rand wondered if they really were the enemy. Perhaps the whole thing was a comic opera plot where no one really cared if Ivor Kudat's messages got through or not. Perhaps the man in Berne never even bothered to read them.

Rand drifted over to where Perkins, the C.I.A. man, stood against the wall, a half-finished cocktail in his hand. "Are these things always the same?"

Perkins nodded. "As unchanging as the Pyramids."

"Is it safe to talk here?"

"The safest place in Hoihong. The only place you can be sure the Russians haven't bugged."

Rand placed his own glass on a convenient table and lit a cigarette. "Just how important is the information Kudat is passing?" He kept his voice low and his eyes on the nearest guests.

"Damned important. With even a weekly check on our ship movements they can spot concentrations near

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Viet Nam or Formosa. More important, they can pinpoint our Polaris subs."

"How does this girl get the information to pass along to him?"

Perkins shrugged. "You have to trust somebody. She was cleared for the job."

"Why don't you arrest her and end it?"

"Well, as of now, the messages don't seem to be doing the Reds any good. We'd rather have everything under control like this than have them sneaking around where we don't know about it. Besides, we know the address of Kudat's contact in Berne. If our luck holds, the address might change and then we'll pick up a couple more of their contacts."

Rand nodded. It made sense, and yet . . . "I still wish he was sending those cards by air mail—it would make the whole thing so much tidier."

They were interrupted by a burst of applause. The Russian Ambassador had stepped to the center of the room with his arm in fatherly position around his British counterpart's shoulders. Rand sighed and went for another drink. It looked like a long night.

The following morning, after too few hours of sleep, Rand stood in front of the Ambassador's desk, surprised that the white-haired man seemed so alert.

"You get used to it in this business," the Ambassador explained. "How is your investigation progressing, Rand?"

"Well, I know as much as Fraze and the C.I.A., but I can't say I'm happy about it. The whole situation's too—well, too uncertain. We think we're outwitting the Russians—but maybe we're not."

The Ambassador nodded. "My feelings exactly. That's why I requested help from Double-C when I read Fraze's reports. He's a good man, but he may be too close to this thing. True, the whole problem is really an American one—there are no British secrets involved. But, of course, we'd like to help."

"I understand, sir."

"Do you have any suggestions?"

Rand thought about it. "One, but I'd like to talk with Fraze about it first."

The Ambassador nodded. "Microdots! This whole business of spying is getting much too refined for me. It's for you younger fellows, I suppose, all this technical stuff. But you still have to know how to handle yourself in a dark alley at night."

Rand smiled. "I stay out of dark alleys as much as possible."

He left the Ambassador and went across the main reception room to Arthur Fraze's little office overlooking the rear gardens. The older man was smoking his pipe, leafing casually through the Far Eastern edition of an American news magazine. He looked up as Rand entered

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and tossed the magazine down on an already cluttered desk. "Sometimes I think those damned correspondents know more about Red China than we do. How are you doing?"

Rand perched on one corner of the desk, next to a pair of gilded bookends that held a set of slim volumes on British foreign policy. "I survived last night's reception, if that's what you mean."

Arthur Fraze chuckled. "You get used to it."

"I know. That's just what the Ambassador told me."

"It's the truth. You staying on much longer?"

"Probably not. But he wants some action. I'm going to bring in the girl."

Fraze's eyebrows went up. "That will really finish it."

Rand shrugged. "Maybe. We'll see."

Her name was Ruth Young, and she had worked for the Americans nearly two years. Both her parents were British, and her background was good. She was slim and blonde and much better looking up close than she had seemed the previous day when Rand saw Ivor Kudat meet her. Across the desk from him she seemed full of innocence.

"Miss Young," he began, "I'm sorry to trouble you like this, but we're working with the Americans to clear up a little matter. You know a man named Ivor Kudat?"

"I . . . Yes."

"Exactly what is your relationship with him?"

"We're friends. He helped me find a place to live when I came here."

Rand leaned back in his chair. "Miss Young, it happens that Ivor Kudat is an agent in the pay of the Russian government. You have been delivering to him certain weekly reports on the position of American ships in this area."

The blood drained from her face.

"You're in very serious trouble. Do you have anything to say?"

Her chin lifted in a sudden defiant gesture. "You have me, but at least Ivor's out of your clutches. He flew to Hong Kong this afternoon."

"We have men in Hong Kong, too. He won't get far." He offered her a cigarette. "Do you want to tell me about it?"

"No."

"Tell me just one thing. Did Kudat's plan work?"

"Of course it worked!" Her eyes sparkled as she said it. "I've waited so many years to make fools of you stupid British!"

"Thank you," he said, almost sadly. "That was all I really wanted to know."

He left her under guard and went back to the Embassy to see Fraze. The afternoon streets were crowded but vaguely quiet, and over the city hung an air of vague suspense. Perhaps it was the weather—cloudy with a threat of rain. He wondered

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if the wet season would come early to Hoihong this year. He passed the familiar Oriental faces, the occasional Europeans looking so out of place, the peasants struggling to keep alive.

The Ambassador was not there, but Arthur Fraze was still in his little office. "How'd you make out, Rand?" he asked quietly.

"Pretty fair. We have the girl. Kudat's in Hong Kong, but I have an alarm out for him."

Fraze pulled open a drawer to take out his pipe tobacco. "It seems a shame to break up such a bungling operation."

Rand perched again on the edge of the desk, playing with one of the gilded metal bookends. "But that's the point. It wasn't bungling. Kudat's microdot messages were getting through to the Russians."

"Three weeks late."

Rand shook his head. "Two days, more likely. Or less. You see, our big mistake was that we didn't know where the messages were really going. Kudat's contact wasn't really a man in Berne at all."

"No? Then who was it?"

"You, Fraze," Rand said. "The messages were meant for you."

Fraze's hand came out of the drawer fast, holding a small flat automatic. Rand swung the metal bookend with all his strength, and heard the crunch of Fraze's wrist as it connected. The gun skidded onto the carpet.

"You didn't have to do that," Fraze sobbed, clutching his damaged wrist. "I was going to use it on myself."

The Ambassador turned from a brightly colored wall map of the Hoihong territory and faced Rand across his desk. "I assume you have an explanation for me," he said.

Rand nodded. "Believe me, sir, I was no more happy about it than you. Perhaps he'd just been out here too long, like one of Conrad's heroes."

"How did you know he was working with the Reds?"

"Well, he was obviously unhappy to see me in the first place. It was quite clear that it had been your idea—not his—to notify London about the case. A couple of things struck me, such as the way Kudat immediately spotted me when I watched him meeting the girl, and the way he hopped over to Hong Kong when we started to close in. But none of that really proved anything. It was the whole gimmick—the postcards that took too long. When the girl admitted that their plan had been successful, she really told me a lot. Her admission told me the Russians weren't being completely foolish with their money. The weekly payments to Kudat kept on because he was delivering the goods."

"But Fraze is a member of British Intelligence. Why did he have to buy secrets from someone like Kudat?"

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"Remember, they weren't British secrets. The positions of American ships were as much a secret to Fraze as to the Russians. He couldn't just call up the Americans and ask for them. But once he had those weekly microdot messages, he also had a foolproof way of verifying the information—by asking young Perkins to check it. The postcard went back in the mail, on its long journey by sea to Genoa, and then to Berne, but a copy of the information was passed to the Russians—at one of those Embassy parties that everybody went to almost every week. If there was no party or reception scheduled, Fraze could still see a member of the Russian staff without causing undue suspicion.

"Once I knew the messages were getting through to the Russians in time to be useful, Fraze was the only possible link. He read the messages every week, and he could easily get them to the Russian Embassy—and from there to Moscow by diplomatic code or courier. Two days at the most, for the whole operation."

"Why the microdots? Why didn't Kudat just pass the information to Fraze? Or directly to the Russians, for that matter?"

"Two reasons. Regular weekly meetings between Kudat and Fraze were obviously out of the question, as were regular contacts with the Russian Embassy. Second, the microdots and the cards to Berne gave Fraze an opportunity of not only verifying the information with Perkins, but also of learning C.I.A. reaction and possible countermoves."

The Ambassador stirred in his chair. "How did you first get on to him?"

Rand lit a cigarette and gazed out the window at the city. It was night now, and the lights were going on. Out toward the harbor some of the junks had lanterns glowing. "I suppose because he never told us how he first discovered the microdot messages. It's not the sort of thing you stumble on by accident."

"But why *didn't* Kudat send the cards by air mail?"

"Two reasons again. First, they had to try to keep the C.I.A. convinced that the messages were reaching the Russians too late to do them any good. And second, from a practical standpoint, there'd be a danger of a postcard slipping through on the daily air-mail flights, without being first turned over to Fraze. Going by ship, Fraze could always ask his man at the post office to double-check if he didn't have the card in his hands by Tuesday morning."

The Ambassador looked somber. "How can a man go so wrong?"

Rand didn't answer immediately. He was still staring out the window, thinking that this was probably his last night in Hoihong. When he did reply he said, "Anyway, Arthur Fraze will be going back to England at last."

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magazine **BOX SCORE** for **1964**

In editing his third volume of the BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR (published in July 1965 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.) Anthony Boucher selected 16 stories, of which 14 appeared in magazines (and of these 14 best, 6 were chosen from *EQMM*). Mr. Boucher's Honor Roll listed 113 stories from magazines and 8 stories from books. Here is the box score for the 113 best detective-crime-mystery stories published in all American magazines during 1964:

name of magazine	*Honor Roll stories*	*percentage*
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine	50	44.1%
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine	13	11.5%
Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine	11	9.7%
The Saint Mystery Magazine	11	9.7%
Playboy	6	5.3%
Saturday Evening Post	4	3.5%
Cosmopolitan	3	2.7%
New Yorker	3	2.7%
Argosy	2	1.8%
McCall's	2	1.8%
This Week	2	1.8%
Atlantic	1	.9%
Baker Street Journal	1	.9%
Cavalier	1	.9%
Chase	1	.9%
Horror	1	.9%
Ladies' Home Journal	1	.9%

The percentages above indicate that *EQMM* published nearly 4 times as many distinguished new mystery stories as our nearest competitor, and nearly 1½ times as many as our 3 nearest competitors put together—and *EQMM's* 50 Honor Roll stories in 1964 did not include the superior reprints, both short stories and short novels, which *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* offers throughout the year.

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(Continued from other side)

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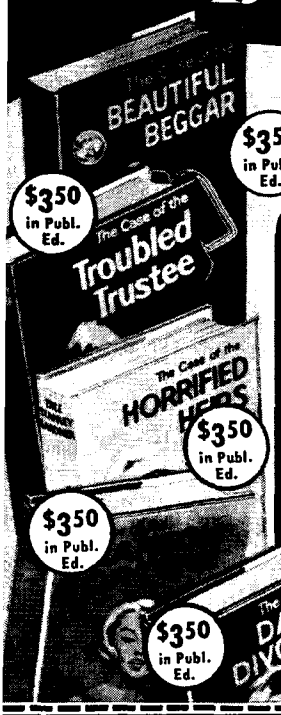
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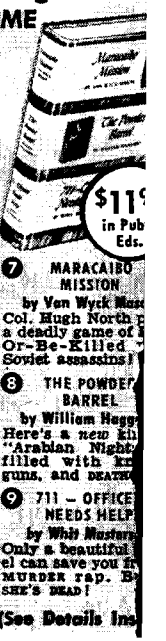

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